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Jump in.







DAY OF THE DEAD

A COUPLE OF years ago I had the privilege of interviewing the godfather of the zömbie movie, George Romero. At the time he was in production hell, struggling to get film companies interested in a new undead project, and in his own words, was "desperate to get back with his zombie buddies". Fortunately, Hollywood eventually succumbed to the rotting menace, and Romero was able to make his recent gory epic Land Of The Dead.

Through pioneers like Romero, and more recently Edgar Wright and Simon Pegg (for the magnificent Shaun Of The Dead) and Capcom (for the Resident Evil series), zombies are now a huge part of our culture. To celebrate, we thought it was time for a monster flesh-eating PC ZONE special. Many months in the planning, we've managed to bring together 20 pages of the best in zombie gaming, mods, budget titles and DVDs, plus a unique free gift of an abridged version of Max Brooks' The Zombie Survival Guide.

In addition, we have a first-play of the Half-Life 2: Survivor coin-op in Japan, news of Valve's co-op survival horror Left 4 Dead and a world-exclusive new hands-on of Enemy Territory: Quake Wars, the stunning multiplayer shooter being crafted right here in the UK. Anyway, must go – Will and Suzy are currently lurching towards me, moaning and trailing Steve's entrails from their slavering mouths. As usual...

Topic &

Jamie Sefton, editor

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UPFRONT Top 10 game zombies



Star Wars: FOC



UPFRONT Max Brooks



REVIEW Neverwinter Nights 2



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THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE **CHRISTMAS** GIFT!

Prey







BOTS Jon Blyth plays with robots that transform... Into bigger robots



FREEPLAY

Steve Hogarty gets by on a wink, a smile and a pathological unwillingness to pay for stuff

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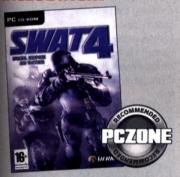
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Turn to page 130 for more information



SUZY WALLACE

Reviews Zombie **AGE: 27** LIKES: Brains **DISLIKES:** Headshots FANCIES: Also brains FAV GAME: Final Fantasy VII **PLAYING NOW:**

Need For Speed: Carbon

On a recent press trip to Chernobyl, Suzy found herself surrounded by obnoxious, vomiting French journalists. Seeking solace from her Gallic company, she broke away from the carefully planned tour only to find herself wandering ever deeper into the radioactive ruins of an exploded reactor. It was then that a spider bit her, giving her the superpowers with which she has now taken control of the office. Our desks are covered in webbing, Suzy refuses to come down from the ceiling and she insists on pushing people off buildings just so she can save them. She got us all souvenirs, though.



JAMIE SEFTON

Editor Zombie

Jamie's developed a habit of presenting the ZONE team with increasingly obscure food. First there was the box of fudge things which had Rice Crispies in, and then came the Simpsons cakes.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: Medieval II: Total War



STEVE HOGARTY

Staff Zombie

Steve's excuses for taking time off work are become increasingly elaborate. Today he concacted four more Trish holidays. and when questioned further he asserted that they each celebrate shamrocks.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: The Sims 2 expansions



WILL PORTER

Deputy Zombie

Will is currently playing multiplayer COD2. He's working his way through the spectrum of swear words, starting with 'damn' and ending with 'c' words rude enough to heat up curries

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: Call Of Duty 2



PHIL WAND

Hardware Zombie

Wandy recently came running into our offices in a panic, claiming that the sky was falling and that we must inform the king. What followed was nothing short of an epic and amazing journey. WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Internets



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Staff Zombie

Frustrated with the amount of open windows on his PC and wary of the time it takes to close them. Log pulled the plug and emitted a fake gasp of shock, claiming it was an accident.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: WOW (now addicted)



STEVE HILL

Freelance Zombie

Steve Hill's freelance career began when he realised people were willing to buy words from him. What he doesn't tell people, however, is that most of the words he uses come from a dictionary

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: Cricket 07

STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH... The increasing size of Steve's ball of elastic bands which grows with reassuring steadiness STUFF THAT HASN'T HELPED US THIS MONTH... Aggressive Moroccan snake-charmers and that T-shirt Will always wears

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

RACIST DOGS 36 Mins They don't mean it, they're just badly trained

DAYLIGHT SAVINGS 31 Mins That extra hour of sleep really wasn't worth it, it's pitch-black outside now

SCONES 6 Mins Jamie thinks there's nothing tastier than a homemade scone and jam. Clare agrees

BAGPUSS 68 Mins The only episode anybody can remember is the chocolate digestive machine one

DISCOVER DOGS 80 Mins They had a dog festival right next to a food festival. That's begging for hilarity!

ZOMBIES 147 Mins We've discussed everything from semantics to biological make-up

MOROCCO 22 Mins If you buy a carpet as soon as you arrive, you gain +2 immunity to carpet sellers

COMPETITION ENTRIES 3 19 Mins That drawing competition we had last month was an excellent idea

HOT CAKES 15 Mins These warmed-through cakes are selling like nobody's business

COUNTY DURHAM 28 Mins It's not in Ireland, but it is very far away

This month's Tiny Contpo is sponsored by the new Quiznos just opened up on Baker Street, and dedicated to the hilarious Subway turf wars of 2006. Tiny Compo 174 was won by Wetherilt, Alan Wetherilt. Who we don't expect to talk, we expect to anticipated game of 2007, to Tiny Compo 176, PC 20NE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street. London NW1 6NW.

LETTERS

To some, *Jamie Sefton* is like a god. Letters, pray...





LOVE YOU

I've never written into a magazine, newspaper or even posted on a website, so I hope you realise how big a step this is for me to write in to you. I have one very simple thing to say to you and that is this - you're doing a fantastic job with PC ZONE, and it just keeps getting better. How can you really improve that much on something already nigh-on perfect?

There is no other magazine I'd rather buy, for both amusement (some jokes actually have me in stitches), information and just all-round entertainment. Keep it up - you guys are doing great, and also don't buy Age Of Pirates, as it sucks the sweat of a dead man's balls...

Matthew Reeves



Salticrax: finger-licking good.

HATE YOU

what's this...

You love us and we

love... Oh hang on,

What's with all the swearing in your magazine just lately? Is it really necessary? These magazines are not just read by adults you know. My eight-year-old son reads them too, but I've had to stop him from doing so recently because of the language.

I find it utterly disgraceful and there's no need for it, don't you agree? It's bad enough that games have become more violent with more bad language, without games magazines following suit. You should be ashamed of yourselves - you have no excuse to put that content in your pages.

PC ZONE was once a great mag, and I bought it every month without fail until two years ago when my son asked me what certain words meant - thanks to your ignorence (sic), he's now banned from reading them.

Of course, your mag is not the only one to blame, as other PC mags are becoming the same and will be getting a similar email from me because it needs to be stopped and soon, or it will be the 'F' word or 'B' word on every line. Get it sorted or lose loyal customers - me included.

Steve Groves

Ah well, it was good while it lasted. Come one Steve, with the world about to environmentally collapse, international terrorism and bird flu, I think there are a few more important things to worry about for our children than a tiny bit of good old British swearing, don't you think? I mean, we don't actually swear very much anyway, and we even censor the rudest words with asterisks! You

know, stuff like f***. We can say shit though. And bollocks.

THAT'S LIFE!

Following the picture of the 'Blow Off' cans in issue 173, I thought you might like this picture of some 'Salticrax' biscuits we bought in Cape Town, South Africa. I guess this is what can happen if you spend too long in the sea?

Lovely stuff, Rob. Please keep sending us your pics of rude Israeli crisps, innuendo-filled Eastern European boxes of chocs and other tat - the world will be a richer place.

LOL! ROFL! LOLROFL!

I've been playing Battlefield 2142 (after seeing your glowing review and, crucially, giant walking mechs), and was loving the Titan mode. Maybe it's the sheer joy of the new or maybe it's because they've changed my medication, but I found myself bursting out laughing at one particular point.

It was the comedy moment of dashing into the Titan hull, only to be knocked out of the way by a gang of my team-mates who'd already taken out the reactor and were making a sharp dash to the exits. This left me to face a bunch of slightlymiffed troopers, before being blown up along with the Titan. Cheers, lads.

Still, it reminded me that over the years there have been many, many comedy situations in serious games and I think they should be celebrated. Whose life hasn't been enriched by the sight of a dozen tanks attempting to fit in a single

Letter of the month

PC ZONE makes history

Thought you might be interested to see two slices of gaming history at the recent Game On exhibition at the Barbican in London: the first issue of PC ZONE, and the issue where Charlie Brooker eats his own arse. Both classics. **Matthew Durrant**

Well spotted Matthew – you've earned yourself a brand new graphics card. PC ZONE is Britain's first and longestrunning dedicated PC games magazine, so it's fantastic to see that this has been acknowledged by the Barbican exhibition. Next stop - PC ZONE winning an Oscar...



Can you feel the love tonight? Here at PC ZONE we're awash with it, which is why if you write us a letter and we deem it to be the best of the month, we'll reward you with PNY's limited-edition 7600GT PCI-E Splinter Cell bundle, retailing for £99.99. For more info on PNY Technologies, please refer to www.PNY-Europe.com

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Sam & Max: Culture Shock's released! All I'll say is it's f***ing funny. I'm loving every minute!

The Seed

I'm really enjoying it: the script and characters, and everything feels solid, just right. The drop-down options and intuitiveness of the controls and inventory also work well and make it easier to enjoy the funny stuff. A good start.

Dogen_D_Derrible

My only problem is there are almost too many jokes: every single thing you do, joke. Every other item maybe, but you can't laugh consistently for too long you need a bit of a break... ckinnerley

I'm so excited I'd pee my pants if I wore any. randomsimian

It's a wonderful start - I just hope they don't keep so 'local' in the next game. I want a Ball of Twine or Mystery Vortex...

TheTingler Join in the forum larks at www.pczone.co.uk

"I've had to stop my eight-year-old son reading this magazine recently because of the language"

Steve Groves is not amused by PC ZONE's potty mouth...

parking space in C&C, Lara Croft dryhumping a wolf or the hilarious physics of any modern FPS you care to name? So, can we see a PC ZONE Comedy Awards sometime in the future? Dave Lloyd

The problem is that such comedy moments often happen to you as an individual, or between a group of gamers online - such as the Benny Hill-style crowbar rumble we had in Fight Club a few months back. However, we might consider a round-up of gaming comedy moments if we get enough suggestions. Send 'em in.

STOLEN!

Back in issue 149 I had an idea for a game published in your 'Search For A



Game' feature called Paparazzi, of which the panel did not approve. Imagine my shock and horror then, when during a non-porn-related Internet surf today I discovered a PC game called Paparazzi (are you eating humble pie yet?).

Not only has some unscrupulous game developer robbed my idea, they've also had the audacity to make a rather crap job of it, turning my free-roaming vision into a rather girl-friendly 'find the objects among the clutter and spot the difference' mouse-clicker of a game (see the attached screenshot).

Frankly, I demand some recompense for these ne'er-do-wells robbing my idea. A shiny graphics card would suffice. Mike Agar

Well, we did say it would make a crappy game. We'll give you our full support Mike (minus any supporting evidence, personal recommendations or financial backing) if you sue them. Good luck!

LONGEST JOURNEY

Crysis! I heeded my Call Of Duty and set off on an EverQuest, armed with only my PC ZONE mag to shield me against the Shadows Of Angmar! It took me an

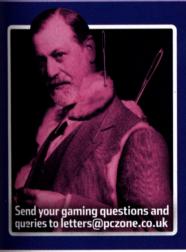
Age Of Empires to reach my destination, even the Battle for Middle-Earth could not stop me! I travelled many miles, sometimes with F.E.A.R., sometimes through Neverwinter Nights, but still I marched on. I have witnessed the Rise Of Nations, The Burning Crusade and the Dawn Of War.

But nothing could prepare me more for the disappointment I was about to receive! After searching through Morrowind without success, my hope rested on the Archlord. He assigned his Psychonauts to aid me in my quest and after informing me of their Chaos Theory, they consulted The Elder Scrolls, and sent me on an elephant back to my final destination. Proof of this aid was sent in to the editor...

Everyone printed wins a prize they said, oh Just Cause, I said... But still no prize, nada, niks. I will go on my own Dark Crusade, pick up my Warhammer, burn you with the Mark Of Chaos and ask for the PC ZONE staff to be whipped to justice. How long I ask ya, how long till I receive my prize? Christo De Lange

OK, OK, you can have your blimmin' prize now Christo, after you've

PINK FREUD After our metallic Dr Jung wiped his memory banks in a tryst with a babe magnet, we fashioned Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) from flesh, fabric and pins. With his research team of 700 toy poodles, Pink Freud exists only to answer your questions...



DEAR DR FREUD,

Can you tell me if there's any chance of someone resuscitating *Harpoon 4* any time soon?

You don't have to be Sigmund Freud - and I am, albeit pink – to spot the phallic nature of the harpoon. It's a dead giveaway, Mr Temple. And 'resuscitating'... Are you suggesting mouth to mouth on this harpoon? Filthy child. Perhaps, however, I can offer you some closure. Harpoon 3: Advanced Naval Warfare was released just six months ago, and is available from www.harpoonhq.com. However, since Ubisoft pulled the plug on H4, there are no plans to resurrect it. Erect! Got me there... There's a strong Harpoon community though, so don't rule anything out...

HI MR PINK FREUD,

I was a big fan of Joint Ops and its expansion pack, but fell to the dark side with BF2. Now that BF2 is unplayably bug-riddled, I was wondering if NovaWorld are planning a Joint Ops 2? Or, is there another expansion pack in the making? It'd be a shame to see it die so quickly. Corporate_sniper

All this talk of expansion packs is getting me quite hot under the collar. I shall have to call mother down for another of her wonderful sponge baths. I'm afraid that I've probed a few channels, and since last year's Combined Arms bundle pack we haven't heard a peep from the developers. What's more, no-one's responding to my persistent nudging. The world can be a lonely place.

LETTERS

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TXT ZONE

Wouldn't it be funny, right, if someone made a Harry Potter mod using the Half-Life 2 engine, they could call it 'HP Source' -Dean

Tried explaining difference between blueray and hi-def DvD to son using betamax n vhs analogy and got blank look for my troubles. Snoogaiden

Sam & Max Culture Shock is the biz - I laughed so hard I snorted stuff out. Dan Hollins

Alan Wake looks amazin, i cant wait to play it. My gf already fancies him too. Tim K

TEXTS SHOULD BE NO MORE THAN 160 CHARACTERS LONG, SO PAY ATTENTION! To txt (text) this magnificent gaming rag, send your mssgs (messages) to 87103, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leaving a space, then continuing with your text – and don't forget to include your name.

By texting PC ZONE, you're agreeing to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties, that may or may not include double glazing salesmen, pornographers and Hoxton fin-wearing marketing scumbags. If you don't want to receive info relating to future offers and promotions, please text the word NO at the the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your standard network tariff rate. Bargain.

PCZONE Around the World



We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

provided a 'PC Zone Around The World' photo taken on the back of an African elephant and a well-written letter. We really make you work for your free PC game on this mag...

FREE GAMES

I thought the box in the *Battlefield 2142* review about advertising was a bit harsh. Don't get me wrong, I'm not some raging soulless capitalist, just hear me out here...

I don't mind advertising in games, but I think in turn publishers like EA should rethink their future pricing structure: if a game has ads in it, it should be free. That's right, like other products that are paid for by advertising, for example the latest big ITV drama, I don't pay to watch *Midsomer Murders* (I wouldn't, it's crap,

but you get my point). A better example might be Film Four, which is now free due to the magic of ads.

So come on EA, what do you say? Advertise all you like, but you already have one form of income paying for your games – us, the punters. Do you really need everything paid for twice? Andy Cull

Great idea Andy. You can read our Special Report on this on page 18.

HACKER CRACKER

When I read your 'The Greatest Games You've (Probably) Never Played' top 10 list in issue 174, I was shocked and thrilled that *Uplink* came in at number one. I've been a huge fan of the game

Uplink: play it now!

ever since it was released - I always

loved the movie Hackers, and a game

for making outstanding, fun games

to play without being graphically

demanding. They give the gamer a

Introversion should hire you for your PR skills, Lewis. Yep, Uplink

should buy it and play it so that

next time we do a similar 'Games You've Never Played' article, it gets

completely ignored. Which would

be a good thing. I think.

buy their games!

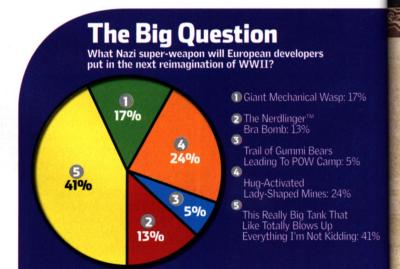
Lewis Codd

like *Uplink* meant I could play something similar. Introversion have a knack

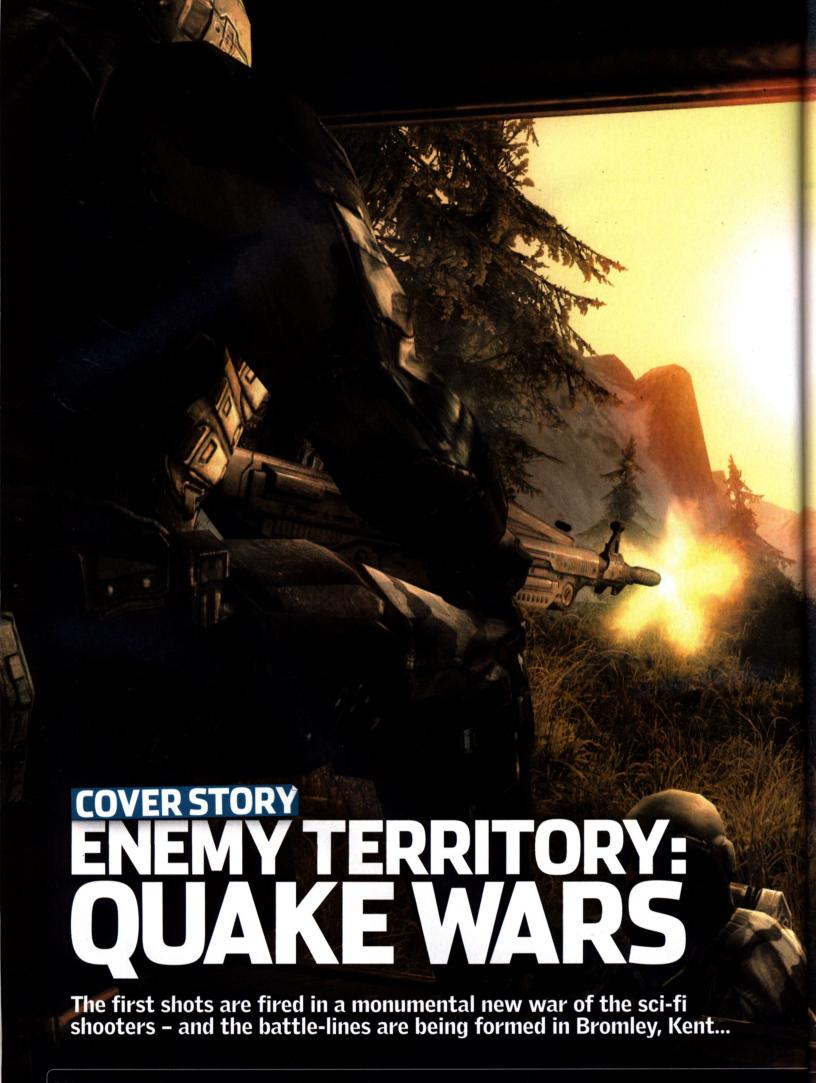
totally different, realistic and imaginative

view to how games are played. Seriously,

was a deserved first place - everyone











PCZNNE

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

CLEAR-UP IN AISLE 14

T WAS PROBABLY while watching a charming documentary on ITV2 (called something like Shit Jobs: I Clean Up Dead People) that I got to thinking, rather morbidly, about the workforce of unseen labourers that mop the walls of my PC's interior after my gruesome killing sprees in SIN: Episodes, Half-Life et al. Of course, your Dooms and your Quakes come with a neat auto body-dissolve that leaves surfaces all shiny, but the clean-up operation after one of my F.E.A.R. fights must be horrendous.

I can just imagine it now: "Jeff! You've missed a bit - there's cranial matter on that lift door." "Righto, Pete. Did y'get up to much last night?" "Nah, Jeff, just a quiet night in. Can you help me carry this upper torso to the skip? It's a bit slippy." "Will do."

Our rampages are providing a huge boost to the internal virtual economy of the PC. The manufacture of all those munitions and bombs is giving dainty-fingered children employment. while East Asian-style sweatshops are busy churning out replacement barrels to satisfy the voracious explosivecontainer market. And that's aside from the fortunes being made by tiny arms dealers who stockpile your PC's armoury with glistening metal.

So I guess the moral of this story is, never forget the little man. Not least when confronted with a scene such as that at the end of Duke Nukem 3D. "What the hell's happened here?" "Oh Jesus - he's only gone and done a shit in his brain." "Can you fetch the Marigolds, Jeff?" "Will do."

Will Porter, deputy editor

A RIGHT 2 LIVE

Valve and CS: Zero developers Turtle Rock to provide Left 4 Dead, the co-op zombie blast we've all been waiting for...

www.valvesoftware.com | ETA: 2007

WITH ALMOST SPOOKY timing for the long-planned PC ZONE Zombie Issue, Valve and their good friends at Turtle Rock Studios have announced a title that's set to provide what gamers have been craving for aeons - decent, co-operative zombie-blasting on PC. Enabling you and up to three buddies to play as 'The Survivors', it's basically 28 Days Later: The Game without the misplaced moralising and awkward feminism. Which means countless

screaming, fast-moving zombies, a slice of Counter-Strike and gigantic urban maps with the living in the distinct minority.

It's not all common or garden zombies either - here known as 'The Infected'. There are also villains such as The Smoker - a malcontent we think may be distantly related to the tentacle beast famously edited out of the final cut of Half-Life 2. There you'll be, wandering merrily through apparently deserted streets, when suddenly, a tongue will appear from nowhere, grab one of your





Eternal darkness

EVE creators CCP and role-play legends White Wolf have merged, and are planning a World Of Darknessbased MMO. Vampire: The Masquerade Online?

If the tracks are united...

TrackMania United, the latest iteration of the Gallic trick-racer, is on the way. TM has fallen off the UK radar of late, but we'll get the latest next issue.

Rise of the...

There's a new game on Steam called RoboBlitz that's rather good. Check out the demo of the Unreal Engine 3 shooty-puzzler; we'll have a full review next issue.

Half-Life 2 coin-op

You're unlikely to see it in your local Megabowl, so here's the news on Gordonsan's Japanese adventures.



Zombie Special

> What's in your head? What's in your he-e-e-ead? Zombie. Zombie. Zombieeh-ah-ah-ah?



Enemy Territory

Quake Wars

A shiny, shiny beacon for multiplayer gaming everywhere - we've played Quake Wars tons. And it's really special.





number by the neck and drag him into the rafters - choking him as he goes.

Think that's cool? Well, how about a pustule-ridden Goliath built to puke on members of your team, thereby rendering them violently irresistible to anyone of the zombie persuasion in your immediate vicinity?

With maps designed for heavy replay value that'll take around 45 minutes or so to complete, a selection of weapons that encompasses all the necessities of zombie lore (shotguns, petrol bombs, dual pistols) and shuffly sorts that can interact with chuckable physics objects (the big ones can hurl cars), all in all, Left 4 Dead is looking

quite the prospect. But wait - there's more! If you by any chance have more than three friends, the less popular ones can play as zombies too! Yes, kids, that's right - the AI of these agile shamblers may be good in itself, but there's the option of adding up to four real human noggins into the mix too. Obviously, balancing may prove to be an issue in a four vs four battle, but such confrontations have the potential to be as stunning as some of the game's giant boss creatures.

So, could Left 4 Dead be the first game with a needless numeral in the middle to buck the trend of being awful? All signs point to 'Yes!'



<u>JTY-BOUND</u>

Fermentation of Call Of Duty 4 rumours continues apace

WHISPERS THAT INFINITY Ward are dragging the Call Of Duty franchise away from the WWII era have always been rife, but now further details have bubbled to the surface. With the action reportedly transplanted to the modernday - and presumably taking place in

a rather sandier arena - the character models are said to be so detailed that you can shoot an enemy's ear off or spin their helmet around with a wellplaced bullet. Ridiculous hokum, or an accurate report of things to come? To be honest, it all sounds rather likely..

NEW BEST FRIEND

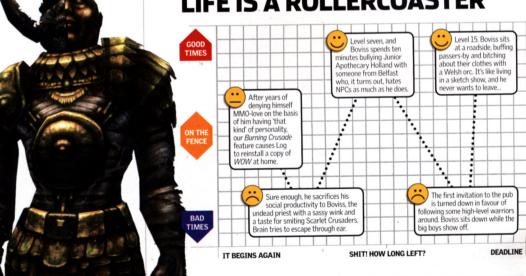
How to unlock your new Guild Wars: Nightfall mini-pet

HE DOESN'T SAY much, but he's extremely loyal - and what's more, the Gray Giant mini-pet is a free gift from the big-hearted people at PC ZONE to all our Nightfallplaying readers. But how can you unlock him? Just follow these simple steps!

- Go to the in-game login screen. Click on the bit that says 'Create Account or Enter Access key' and type in the key code that's been lovingly printed on the back of your PC ZONE DVD sleeve.
- Run the game and travel to the exciting port of Kamadan.
- Tap in /bonusitems this should stick a 'Broken Toy' in your inventory.
- Accept a quest called 'The Toy's Story' from a chap called Mahk.
- Go and sort out a whimsical djinn, complete the quest and the Gray Giant is yours!

STUFF The Golden Joysticks have been and gone, and the game that brought home the PC bacon was The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, scooping both the Play.com Ultimate Game of the Year and the Ebuyer PC Game of the Year award. The posh ceremony also saw the nice chaps at Ebuyer smuggling PC ZONE into the VIP area to help them quaff champers, which was when Will's mum saw him on TV and fell off her chair. Rock and roll!

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



AND THE BRAND PLAYED ON...

Virtual billboards, product placement and suspect tracking technologies. Are PC games selling their souls?







Reporter Pavel Barter

OT POTATO, **ANYONE?** News that *BF2142* is infected with adtracking technology has sparked some of the choicest quotes

on the PC ZONE forum since the Steam/Valve shitstorm: "This has to be stamped out": "I won't be buying"; "Shady borderline spyware": and "Bring on Quake Wars!" But of course, who's to say that come release, Quake Wars too won't be up to its neck in virtual advertising?

Fact is, courting advertisers has become an accepted part of the PC game production process, and if that means you have to bath in Red Bull for added energy, or wear Agent Provocateur undies while straddling a quad bike, so be it. "Publishers and advertisers have become over-zealous." reckons Damian Thompson of global research group Mediaedge:cia, and author of 'Playing With Brands', a report on in-game advertising, "Brands are desperate to exploit this medium. They're

games such as The Matrix Online and PlanetSide shove images of carbonated drinks down your gullet. Meanwhile, Splinter Cell: Double Agent is smeared with Nivea For Men, making Sam Fisher the first metrosexual stealth assassin.

You can find Nivea skin creams in Double Agent's hotel rooms and ship cabins. There are billboards in NYC. New Orleans and Shanghai, and a boutique window in the game's cruise ship, revealing manly skin products and a Nivea poster. Skulk about in shadows garrotting hapless guards. Why? Because you're worth it, you smooth-skinned nutjob.

"We wanted to pursue innovative ways to capture more attention from the notoriously hard to reach 18-34year-old male consumer," explains Joe Venezia, Nivea For Men marketing manager. "When we started researching videogame titles, Splinter Cell: Double Agent presented a successful top-tier title that offered a strong match with

the Nivea For Men target demographic and a realistic environment that Nivea products and billboards could organically be placed into."

HANG ON A MINUTE

Marketing gurus might claim that ingame advertising is nothing new. Back in Neanderthal days, Kool-Aid Man gargled violently colourful liquid on the Atari 2600; space monkey E.T. gorged his way through Reeses Pieces; and Crazy Taxi dropped us off at KFC. But MMOGs illustrate how virtual advertising now means big bucks - Second Life features an island for US bank Wells Fargo, and even a Nissan car vending machine.

While the developer is building a game, an in-game ad broker (usually one of the big three companies: Massive Inc, IGA or Double Fusion) will liaise and work out the best locations for billboards and product placements. Middleware companies like Demonware provide tech that can harvest data, tracking 'playing











habits and characteristics' - favourite teams, stages of the game, weapons and so on. "Publishers want to know the most popular aspects of their games, and that information is later used to place ads," says Dylan Collins, Demonware CEO.

Dynamically-updated billboards are all the rage in 2006: these are the source of contention in BF2142, but prove extremely effective for advertisers and publishers. When an ad is cemented into a game disc, it can't be changed or localised, and there's no way of telling how many times people looked at it. Online, billboards can be updated

IGA's Ed Bartlett explains: "This. form of advertising allows us to create time-sensitive campaigns, geo-targeting and a real sense of investment in terms of how many people have seen it. If the advertiser says, 'we want to reach an 18-24 male audience in Belgium', we can look at our network and say, these are the games that have that exact demographic'. That way, we don't end up showing French advertising to Americans."



Joshua Graff, spokesperson for Massive Inc (who recently launched Toyota interactive ads in Anarchy Online), offers an example: "Sprite ran a campaign in Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory. One of the game's environments is Grand Central Station, so we skimmed a vending machine with the Sprite emblem. This didn't get in the way of gameplay and wasn't out of tune with reality."

BATTLEFIELD NOW

But it does little to calm concerns that tracking technology in games like BF2142 is morally dubious at best, downright dodgy at worst. IGA introduced the technology to the game for EA - so, fess up, is this spyware or what? "That absolutely is not the case," states Ed Bartlett. "99.9% of websites are much more aggressive in the information that they take from you. Our software doesn't even store the user's IP address and we certainly don't track browsing habits. The IP address is purely used to geo-target the country you're in."

According to Bartlett, BF2142 tracking software only recognises onscreen adverts, reporting the number of times they're seen and their on-screen size when seen. "That's all we're doing! I've seen so many rumours posted about this matter, but we have no way of looking at what you're doing." Ed Bartlett, a former developer who worked for The Bitmap Brothers and Acclaim, discovered the funding possibilities for in-game advertising when trying to create a game called Speedball Arena.

"From 2002 to 2003, over 30 game developers across the UK went out

Shiny future explanation of in



So how will your action MMO 2Moons break from the normal conventions of in-game advertising?

'We have a pretty big idea. It starts with the concept of not ramming the advertising down the throat of the consumer, Battlefield 2142

being this month's example, where you just paid full price for a game, but the publisher decided to stick adverts in there too, without asking the consumer. So we asked consumers. 'If we let you turn the adverts off, would you turn them off?' The answer was 100% 'Yes'. That's making the BF decision not look too smart. Then we asked consumers: 'If we gave you benefits to having the advertising there, like the game being free - and if you turn them on, we'll double your experience points - would you turn it on?' The stats right now on this poll are 97% 'Yes'. So I guess my point is, ask the consumer... If 100% said no, we wouldn't go down that road. But interestingly, that's what the consumers have said to the old model, yet all other publishers are going down that road. So for my 2Moons game, I have to take my hat off to Acclaim for being more open-minded than every other publisher out there right now."

But won't it be a challenge, incorporating real-world brands without breaking the illusion of a fantasy world?

"The next trend will have live advertising all over in-game characters. You'll likely have the 'Coca Cola' shield of doom, and the reality is this will seriously hurt the fantasy. We're proposing to have a static image in the corner of the screen, somewhat like when you see a 'Sci-Fi' logo when you watch the Sci-Fi channel here in the USA. We refuse to go down the road many websites have, where they fill the screen with a giant advert that's right over the thing you're trying to read. It's abusive and we just won't do that."

"Publishers and advertisers have become over-zealous... I fear we're now on the point of a feeding frenzy"

Damian Thompson, Mediaedge:cia

of business. This is a difficult time and I don't think consumers understand how much it costs to make a game these days. The industry needs new revenue streams."

BEST-DRESSED ORC

Life might be tough as a developer (how tough it is for EA is questionable), but from a gamer's perspective, a poorly placed ad can ruin the experience. Fantasy brands like Sprunk in GTA: San Andreas work because they're ironic, driving a licensed car in Need for Speed: Carbon makes complete sense, and using a Samsung PDA in Splinter Cell is no great leap of the imagination. Wearing a Versace[™] loincloth in a fantasy RPG, on the other hand...

On the bright side, at least the industry has come a long way since the morally bankrupt days when games like Outrun would feature Marlboro billboards. Demonware's Dylan Collins agrees: "Publishers live in constant fear of having a hardcore porn ad thrown into

a Barbie Horse Adventure game." And there might even be a positive side to this advertising frenzy - Acclaim's upcoming 'totally brutal' MMORPG 2Moons, created by Dave 'Earthworm Jim' Perry, will be entirely funded by advertising and free of charge (see 'Shiny Future', above).

Whatever your stance, Damian Thompson at Mediaedge:cia reckons you better get used to more in-game ads and more in-game tracking. "I fear that we have now turned a corner and are on the point of a feeding frenzy. In-game advertising is not going to become more intelligent, we're just going to see an awful lot more of it."

Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk pavel barter, pc zone,

2 balcombe st, london, nwl 6nw

UPFRONTHANDS-ON



ELVEON



Seasoned spearman Jon Blyth is doing it for the good of his elf...

DEVELOPER 10 tacle Studios PUBLISHER 10 Tacle WEBSITE www.elveon.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 170

THE LOWDOWN

The more acceptable face of elves

The Unreal Engine 3's looking fine

Potentially excellent combat system

Constant elf-on-elf violence

Stylish progress isn't rewarded

with an orc. He's either a Tolkien-manufactured aberration, or a partially-evolved fungus. Whatever they are, they're aggressive and uncivilised, and they're rarely seen cuddling or combing each others' hair in assembly. The same goes for another fantasy staple, dwarves. Whether they're from the mountains or the underground, they're beardy chaps with a thrifty love of the coin. All grand, negative stereotypes that we can laugh at without seeming racist because, after all, they don't exist. Even if the dwarves in *Warhammer: Mark Of Chaos* are blatant Scotsmen (see page 60).

Elves are different. Your basic elf is wise, beautiful and honourable – that's a positive stereotype, and it doesn't feel right. Luckily, we're excellent at finding the bad in the good, so elves are written off as fey, almondfaced tree-humpers who only use bows and arrows because they slap like ladies. WOW players will have seen the 'butching-up' of the too-feminine male Blood Elves. Basically, no-one likes elves, with their stupid ears and la-di-da horses. They don't even like themselves; just watch the Dark and High Elves going at it in Warhammer.

CONSIDER YOUR ELF

Elveon (meaning Book of the Elves, madeup language fans) plans to right this savage elfophobia. This isn't your general orcs and goblins fantasy story; Naon is a land inhabited almost exclusively by the elves. A race of god-descended elven warriors, no less, who're eager to develop their powers to reach those of their creators. That's one thing that often gets overlooked with the happy-clappy stereotype of the elves – they're really a power-crazed bunch of fascists.

MY PRETTY

10tacle's Slovakian Studios are laying on the visuals with the woodland environments; the furry light leaking through the trees, even post-Oblivion, still has the power to raise an eyebrow. It's a thrilling taste of what the Unreal Engine 3 can bring, but even the prettiest waitress can drop boiling soup in your lap, and 10tacle are trying as hard as possible to design clumsiness and stupidity out of their combat system.

Dark Messiah had a brave stab at first-person melee fighting, but it could be frustrating when you felt like your well-placed blows were going unfairly astray. Elveon – in the third-person – promises to be potentially frustrating in a different way; that your moves are blocked by a visible demonstration of your opponent's skill. And then they hit you back, because they're better than you are.

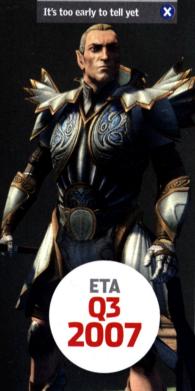
With *Elveon*, your weapon doesn't hit a vague sphere, it hits their weapon – or better still, their face. So the main difference is that it should become less frustrating the better you get. However, we'll only find out if that's true when we get a chance to get better at it.

Fantasy devotees can relax; it's deadly earnest. If any of you have learned enough Klingon to get by on an away-break to the home-planet, you'll be pleased to know the entire game is voiced in Elvish, with subtitles, so you get all the smug pleasure of feeling like you're watching something sophisticated and foreign, without the burning resentment that someone out there is probably enjoying the dialogue more than you are. Ingenious, really.

ONE OF THE FAMILY

Whichever of the four fighting styles you choose to develop, and whether you choose to become a god of spears or an all-round weapon-juggler, character improvements are more *Dark Messiah* than *Devil May Cry*; at pre-defined points in the storyline, you'll be taken to

"Can I put it down now? My arms are really starting to hurt."



THE STORY SO FAR... 10TACLE STUDIOS PUTABLE STUDIOS AS

"Is there a 24-hour garage

around here, mate?

Hello 10tacle How ya doin', 10tacle? Want a biscuit? Yes you do! Come and get a biscuit!

2004



Beyond Dome Of York What the hell's a dome of York, and why in go beyond it?

2004



GTR2 Ah, cars. That's more like it. We all know cars. They're brum-

2006

10Tacle's 50-strong team grease their spears in preparation for hot elf action.

2007





Scrap! Because sometimes, you have to...



As we can see, this young man finds himself in a bit of a pickle. Luckily, your foes can damage each other, so if you make sure you're not stuck in the middle, then chances are some of the more stupid attacks of the elf at the back will work in your favour. Timing your combos takes a little getting used to, and your enemies can often sidestep, leaving you triple-slashing away from them and leaving yourself prone. Mashing those keys won't get you anywhere; this isn't on PS2 and you're not an orc, so stop acting like one.



Don't go. I made cupcakes.

Elves may be seen as happy-clappy, but they're really a power-crazed bunch of fascists the Dragon Room to upgrade. You won't be able to fully develop your character in any one game, but then again you won't be robbed of new moves by not killing everything, or chaining a soggy string of combos.

Elveon will be coming out for Windows late next year, so plenty could change yet. We didn't get a chance to play a beefed-up character, so the pleasures of high-level manoeuvres

were neglected in favour of experiencing the basic combos of sword and spear. Even so, Elveon feels like it has serious potential. On the one hand, it's got the potential to be pompous, self-regarding and not as good as it thinks it is. That's the elven way. On the other hand, if everything snaps together, Elveon has the potential to be genuinely beautiful, thoughtful and rewarding. PCZ

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STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBY

Suzy Wallace sifts through the fallout to discover what's left of the radioactive shooter...

DEVELOPER GSC Game World PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE www.stalker-game.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 174

THE LOWDOWN Set in a unique environment full of life **Pretty graphics** Intelligent stalker AI No freeform play on show **Action feels** ery scripted

Qî **2007**

RENCH JOURNALISTS PUKING

I in the aisle of the coach, unidentified meat substances, hookers and dancing girls: when you're invited on a trip to the Ukraine to see the latest build of STALKER, it's not just radiation that you have to worry about. And so, after a day wandering around the run-down buildings of eerie Pripyat (the now-deserted town that housed most of Chernobyl's workers) while trying not to disturb the patina of radioactive dust that coats everything, we were at last treated to some hands-on play, back in GSC's less-contaminated offices.

Visually, STALKER is still a looker, and although it's not the jaw-dropper that it was two years ago, the blasted landscape littered with decrepit husks of buildings and deserted vehicles still provides a spookily atmospheric setting.

To start, we investigated a mini-town set in the middle of the zone where stalkers congregate to seek lodging, find work, trade and bet on the arena. Dead animals littered the entrance way, shot by a bunch of stalkers guarding the entrance. A stroll around town revealed other

groups of stalkers, each wearing their own distinctive outfits, converged around fires in ramshackle buildings, patrolling the complex and frequenting the bar, while an elite group hung out in their own private camp within the grounds.

STREETS AHEAD

Another level saw us infiltrating the streets of Pripyat along with an allied group of stalkers. As the team advanced down the deserted streets, enemy soldiers opened fire from windows, rooftops and sidestreets. The few ground troops used cover to their advantage, hiding behind vehicles only to pop out and take shots at anyone venturing into the open. A few anomalous areas were visible, sending up strange sparks as a visual warning, while the fullymodelled buildings enabled a spot of stealthy sneaking through the ruined interiors to get closer to my destination.

The last scene saw a settlement of allied stalkers calling for help after being attacked by the military. Arriving on the scene and taking out any soldiers via heavy use of any cover, I came across one guy cowering in a stairwell, who led me

to an underground entrance. After descending into the darkness, I was confronted with tense close-quarters combat, some green-glowing anomalous zones and after a bit of exploring, one of the now famous, and also pretty tough, tentacle-mouthed mutants.

When STALKER was first announced, the things that really piqued our interest were its ambitious aims, the freeform gameplay and realistic AI. But over the years, many features have been dropped, the AI's been scaled back and the levels that we played through appeared to be disappointingly scripted, although how much this applies to the whole game is still unclear. The massive selection of weaponry was also fiddly, and trying to sort out the correct ammo often proved my downfall in the midst of a firefight.

While STALKER may yet prove itself to be a unique and impressive addition to the FPS genre, the fact we still haven't got to play through any freeform content (one of the game's most touted features) is a bit worrying. Will STALKER's unique gameplay remain intact or has it now mutated beyond all recognition? PEZ





UPFRONTNEWS

PROFESSIONALS

Uncovering the lies and slander perpetuated by PC gaming

IT'S NO OVERSTATEMENT to say that dogs are the best thing in the world. They go 'woof', they respond to any direct command by cocking their heads, and left to run wild they form cheeky little gangs with a St Bernard as the boss. Well, that's as far as our understanding of them goes, anyway.

So it's probably a good thing we got a genuine expert in for this month's canine Professionals. Amanda O'Neill has written dozens of books about dogs, including The Best-Ever Book Of Dogs, and the out-now-so-buy-it What Dog?. We bow to her superior knowledge...

uthor Expert pedantry: Representation of doggy dog-dogs in gan



"Well, OK, Sam isn't really a dog at all. He's a freelance police officer who just happens to have a cartoon dog's head. He does claim at one point to be an Irish setter, but I think he may have been

drinking at the time - that head looks more hound than gun dog to me. With his all-American attitude and his refusal to give up on a trail, I'd argue for a Redbone Coonhound. Regardless of breed, Sam has to be the best in show' in any round-up of PC canines; character counts for more than

show points any time - and anyway, Max would probably dismantle any judge who disagreed.'





THE SIMS 2:

PETS
"I've spent ages trying not to be distracted by the oddly positioned forelegs, the dislocated lower jaw and the worrying dentition, and instead tried to work out what the Sims designers

think this is. I think it's a badly bred American bulldog wearing a pair of ears borrowed from a French bulldog. Something about its apologetic posture and strangely staring eyes suggests that it is aware of the problem

and suffering some degree of existential angst about the whole thing. Can 1 look away now? This one worries me."





NO ONE LIVES FOREVER
"Hey, I recognise this one. It's one of those little plastic dogs they used to give away in cornflake packets back in the '50s. It's meant to be funny, right? I mean, if you really wanted to distract a guard dog, you'd probably prefer to use a nice steak or a lady dog in an interesting condition, rather than

a plastic poodle with a badly outdated clip and very dodgy forelegs. It doesn't look functional at all – more like one of those cheap wind-up toys that march off the edge of the table. They really didn't try with this one.





RESIDENT EVIL

"I detect a bit of genetic engineering here – this is clearly an attempt to hybridise a Dobermann with a hyena (only they forgot some of the skin). Even if it's not a good

breed specimen though, it doesn't deserve what's happened to it - having its ears cropped and then being turned into a zombie. Dobermanns have had a raw deal in horror movies and games ever since *The Omen*. But then, a breed designed by a tax collector was never going to get a good press..."





HALF-LIFE 2

"Difficult to see the canine element here. It's got four legs. Oh, and though I haven't seen it, I'm assured that the electric-fan arrangement representing its head moves according to its mood to create cute canine expressions. Despite this, the whole

ensemble looks more like a modern-art portrayal of a great ape in knuckle-walking posture, with a severely hunched spine suggesting osteoporosis. The centre of balance looks all wrong, though – if it tried to operate one of those massive forelimbs. the whole structure would probably tip over."



WINNER: Sam & Max

A good contrast is better than a bad match, as they say, and thanks to his winning personality, Sam snaps up the award from the mouths of zombies, robots and *The Sims 2*. Despite technically not being a dog.

ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL?

PC ZONE is in search of readers with professional knowledge or anally retentive knowledge in the following fields, and many more:

*Light fittings *Portable light sources *Crates *Locksmithery *Burglary *Nazi uniforms *Foreign accents *Monkeys *Vending machines

If you want to cast your eye over these or any other PC gaming areas, then email us at TheProfessionals@pczone.co.uk and stick your oar in as far as it'll go.





ABOUT... FACE!

Turning Point: the game where the Nazis get further than Alderney

www.war-front.com | ETA: Q1 2007

THE WORLD WAS only recently treated to fresh FMV of Hitler being assassinated, when Rush For Berlin played out an alternate-timeline version of WWII. Digital Reality have taken the idea and gone much further - in making War Front: Turning Point, they've not just tinkered with the timeline; they've discarded most of the facts. And a good thing too those facts were getting pretty darn repetitive. Germany the bad guys and the losers, indeed.

In Turning Point, Britain has fallen to the Nazi invaders (boo), but don't worry too much. Hitler gets assassinated (hooray), and the Germans and Allies team up to defeat a new enemy, the Russians. It's just like at school, where you give the bully sweets, then both go and pick on someone else.

Once again, we've got Nazi superweapons, but this time, it's not just the Maus super-tank and other weapons that were historically in development.

Taking inspiration, perhaps, from Crytek's upcoming arctic baby, the game features Ice Spitter tanks that will freeze the enemy in a block of ice. It might be a case of 'same effect, different graphic', but since when did that stop something feeling good? They've also included mechanical exoskeletons, which the developers freely admit are 'inspired' by Sigourney Weaver's suit in Aliens.

Each side has its strengths: the Allied forces have superior air power, the Nazis have the cool tech and the Russians (available only in multiplayer) - well, the Russians have millions of people they'll happily throw into your gunfire. It's a very familiar matter of basebuilding, resource management, heroes and research, treading equally familiar historical ground. We'll just have to see whether it has the power to make an impact in a world where Faces Of War and the stellar Company Of Heroes have only just parachuted in.

In American politics, there's one person whose rightwing homophobia has led to his name being reclaimed by a comedian as a euphemism for anal fluids. The recently defeated Rick Santorum, enthusiastic politician with a moral mission, has swivelled his creationist eye onto videogames again, using agonisingly vague adjectives such as 'violent' and 'inappropriate' as a basis for censorship. He's also recently appeared in a video decrying said videogame violence, where he elbows a wrestler in the face - sending the rather mixed message that you've got the right to raise a fist, but only for votes, and not for points. Thankfully, we in the British Isles are largely unaffected by this sort of nonsense, and the worst we get - apart from the constant tabloid allusions to drug addiction - is Metro running a fabricated piece about TOCA having an M25 level.

In other news, the southerly neighbours of our nuclear-capable friends the North Koreans have recently taken their clan loyalties outside of RF Online, Lineage and the like and organised real-life 'Hyon-P' battles in their nation's school playgrounds. South Koreans, identifying more closely with their online adventures than is recommended, are increasingly finding MMOrelated violence an issue in their schools - although Western democracies can rest easy, since all involved in the recent spate of fisticuffs got detention.

Lastly, future E3 events - whatever name they go by, and regardless of whether they're in Las Vegas or a potting shed in Leicester - look set to exclude the wonderful gaming public. Control of the invites has moved from the ESA to its members – games publishers and console manufacturers. EA and Activision might see less direct benefit from allowing the public into this new event, especially when it was their fiscal prudence that prompted the downsize in the first place. Expect fewer lairy blaggers next year... But don't worry, as Steve Hill's attendance is thought to be unaffected.

DOMINATE THE WARHAMMER WORLD WITH A BATTLE FORCE OF YOUR VERY OWN...

An unprecedented level of customisation allows you to create your own unique Warhammer army!

Stamp your authority on the Warhammer world, crushing your enemies with an army that fights under your own personal banner!

Brutal animation and bone-crushing sound bring the Old World kicking and screaming into life.

Cutting edge A.I. combined with a dark gothic atmosphere immerses you in the most intense Warhammer battles experienced on PC.



















www.markofchaos.com

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While choosing sandwiches in a nearby lunch boutique today, you casually mentioned you were a great fan of the hack-and-slash genre, wherein you simply click on an animal of some sort - perhaps a wolf - and watch your character hit it with various sticks of increasing worth. On further thought, you were explicitly talking about Diablo, one of the most overrated slices of bobbins ever. It's shit, Log - has the fact that no one has ever properly reinvented the genre since Diablo II not shown you that in this case, millions of people can be wrong? Will Porter

Dear Will.

So you've boiled a game down to its most basic elements in order to insult it. I could easily counter that your life is nothing more than a worthless robotic cycle of eating cheese rolls and going "Burr, by nabe's Willbo". I'll admit that Diablo appeals to the section of the brain where mental illnesses are kept, but your summary was also a fair appraisal of World Of Warcraft. And I'm fairly certain I saw you pressing your face against the screen to get closer to your beloved Blood Elf... Jon 'Log' Blyth

Dear Log,

OK, so WOW could be seen as having a similar 'black hole of statistics camouflaged by design cleverness' addiction mechanic - but it's also about community, exploration and a bazillion other things. Diablo is little more than standing somewhere randomly generated and clicking on skeletons till they die. Another villain in this parade, Titan Quest, has a bit of a Harryhausen thing going for it - but really, what's the point? Games are meant to put you behind the sword, not 50ft above your hero's isometric head. WP

Come on. Some people might get off on the community aspect of WOW, but you know as well as I do that we're only suffering the company of those people as a means to an end. We don't thrill to co-operation and battle-worn camaraderie - we just need to level-up so we can use that ruddy wand that's been sitting in our backpacks for three hours. You love WOW for the same reasons I love Diablo, and I put it to you that your anti-Diablo outburst would be better directed towards a mirror. JB

Sigh. Hoist by my own petard. You're right - the reason I stay up past my bedtime to play WOW isn't because of the scintillating chat or chummy goodness of Azeroth. It's because I want to level-up, learn a new ability or buy a better sword. Which is exactly why you like Diablo, isn't it? Well, this is a rum do, it really is. Never mind - at least I'm not a big, stupid ginger. That would be awful. WP

THRONE OFF HIS MORTAL COIL

Immortal Throne expands the Titan Quest battle into Hades itself

titanquestgame.com | ETA: Q1 2007

POOR GREEK GODS. After getting to fanny about. turn each other into peacocks and use humans as their playthings for so long, they've decided that mankind should probably get to take control of its own destiny. Most gods pull this trick, though. It's a crafty one to stop you asking for miracles. You just get a secretary saying, "Oh, Zeus doesn't do that sort of thing any more; he's in megalomania rehab."

Luckily, the time of everyday human behaviour isn't yet upon the Greeks. The Titans may be dead - thanks to your efforts - but there's a growing army of undead flowing from Hades. It looks like it's down to you to find your way into the underworld and click on them. Click on them until they die.

Immortal Throne will feature a whole new Titan Quest act, with ten hours' gameplay, 20 new monsters and 30 new quests. In an ideal world, this simple arithmetic progression would go on forever, but the next number is the level cap, which has been raised to 75. The expansion delivers a new skillset, too - Dream Mastery, which will give you mandrake-esque powers of illusion and induce powerful trances. Sadly, you won't be able to enter the dreams of your enemies and kill them in their sleep. If you've completed Titan Quest without suffering click fatigue, then you should enter hibernation now -Immortal Throne will be out early in the new year.

"Alas, my moat is useless

against aerial attack."



Thrill to enhanced

staircase combat.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The guy who puts story in front of the crowbar

MARC LAIDLAW - WRITER/GAME DESIGNER AT VALVE SOFTWARE

Sci-fi author Marc has written novels such as Dad's Nuke, Neon Lotus and The 37th Mandala - but still has found time to be king story-man and wordsmith on Half-Life 2 and the continuing adventures of Half-Life. And boy, can he talk...

So where did the character of Gordon Freeman come from?

"The character of Gordon Freeman? Well, ultimately he was just a name. There was this character that you played who was this evepiece looking into this universe, a motive force that enables you to move through it. We just wanted to create somebody who didn't get in the way of the player exploring on their own yet feeling like they had a specific role - never quite sure that they were playing it right, but having it as part of the whole experience. Are you doing the right thing or the wrong thing? We really like messing around with the implications of telling you that you're doing one thing, when actually, everything else is forcing you to do something different from that. There's irony in the game - everybody tells you that you're a scientist, but all you're actually doing is running around shooting stuff. All these things fall into the bucket of Gordon Freeman..."

How did the G-Man come about, then?

"I remember Ken Birdwell came into my office and he'd been thinking about all the different functionaries you'd have in an institution like Black Mesa. You have your scientists and their administrators - the tax guys, the government guvs who are checking over the books and representing some other interest - and you're not quite sure who they are. The original concept was born from that and we developed from there. 'What does he do?' 'Well, he's not actually a combat character.' 'So what happens when you shoot him?' 'Well, it turns out you actually can't kill the guy.' 'So what does that mean about him'?"

Were there any characters cut from the original Half-Life?

"Well, we didn't always have the resources; early on we wanted a wider range of characters - we wanted women scientists and stuff there - but we just didn't have the texture read memory. The train says they're an equal-opportunities employer on the way in, but the fact is that there are no women there that day. They all stayed at home; they knew there was something going on.

"The whole relationship with Dr Mossman in HL2 was a scene that we tried to do in

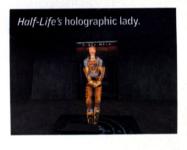
Half-Life. We'd done a whole bunch of stuff for this scene where there was a betrayal by a woman scientist; at that point in the story Freeman was being hunted and you think that the scientists are all your friends, so this scientist says she's going to get you help and tells you to stay in the room you're in - and then she calls the guards. We couldn't do that in Half-Life - we didn't really have characters on that level - so it was cool in HL2 when we had characters who were far enough along..."

Do you often return to your old development and plot ideas, then?

"Well, every now and then something will come up and we'll be like, 'Oh, don't you remember how we tried to do this in Half-Life, but we just couldn't figure out how to make it work?' So yes, we do still pick stuff out of the mix and make it work. I mean, there's a scientist you hear a lot in the test chamber in the early part of Half-Life, and he's never reappeared. And we've finally worked out a place for him where he's been all this time! It's been pretty fun figuring out how to bring that guy back."







Selling as quickly as warmed-through cakes, despite the surfett of cooks

Fly-tipping is a crime. Many a rural gateway owner can attest to the horrors of a skipload of old doors, but now a new horror has emerged: the dumping of gaming merchandise. Only last month in Ilfracombe, Devon, five boxes of XXL UT2007 T-shirts were found along a bridleway - five had blown into a nearby field and scared some sheep. To combat this trend, we sell our unwanted tat for charity on eBay, under the tag PCZoners. Save the countryside: buy our shit.

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk All proceeds go to charity. Honest. www.entertainment softwarecharity.org

THIS MONTH'S TAT



PARAWORLD MOTORCYCLE JACKET



POKERWIZE CAP AND T-SHIRT





WARHAMMER: MARK OF CHAOS BOOKS



LAST YEAR'S **OBLIVION CALENDAR**

THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS	
	ALAN WAKE TORCH We're hoping and praying that the next Alan Wake goodies on offer will be his hat and scarf.	£16.01	8	
erogon	ERAGON TAG Still not sure what the tag is actually for, apart from a cheap advertising ploy. Which worked, we suppose	£4.20	6	
	WORLD OF WARCRAFT T-SHIRT Someone, somewhere can now wear Azeroth as well as live and breathe it. Poor armour value, however.	£26.00	10	
	WARHAMMER: AGE OF RECKONING STRAP How such a strap raised a price of four English pounds is anyone's guess.	£4.00	6	

It is, however, a perfectly nice strap.

CHARTS

Chart*Track*

- **NEW MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR**
- **W FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007**
- W THE SIMS 2: PETS
- WARHAMMER 40K: DOW DARK CRUSADE
- **NEW NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2**
- **NEW BATTLEFIELD 2142**
- **NEW NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON**

- **COMPANY OF HEROES**
- **10 NEW CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2007**
- 11 NEW SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT
- **12 NEW FIFA 07**
- 13 NEW GUILD WARS: NIGHTFALL
- **14 NEW WARHAMMER 40K: DOW ANTHOLOGY**
- 15 NEW SW: EAW FORCES OF CORRUPTION
- 16 NEW PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6
- 17 NEW FIFA MANAGER 07
- THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS
- THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS

20 NEW DARK MESSIAH: MIGHT & MAGIC



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

Keeping historical re-enactment societies out of local parks for going on eight years, Creative



NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON

If we're going by atomic valency, then the next game will be called Need for Speed: Silicon, followed by Need For Speed: Germanium.



THE SIMS 2: PETS

Woof! Or indeed (as the French would have it) wuh! Dogs are great, and for latching onto this fact, we



Crikey - seems the Might & Magic universe isn't all that marketable to the masses after all. Who knew?

EYE OF THE STORM

Maelstrom: now better in nearly every way

www.codemasters.co.uk/maelstrom | ETA: Feb

IN 2050, NOT only will mankind have suffered an ecological apocalypse (so do keep recycling those carrier bags), but we'll have developed into two factions. There'll be no sitting around and picking your nose in 44 years' time - you'll be part of the Ascension or the Remnants, You can probably work out from the names which ones are the corporate money guys and which are the plucky underdogs. Just when you thought you had a series of set-piece skirmishes on your hands, though, along come the Hai-Genti, waterloving aliens who want to terraform the world to resemble their submerged home planet.

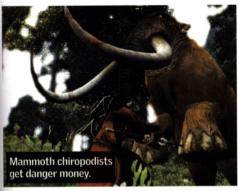
That's the set-up for Maelstrom, the RTS game that was briefly put on hiatus after a early playtesting of the demo met with a disturbingly tepid reception. Thankfully, KDV didn't rush it out and

hide in a cupboard, and postponed their release to deal with the criticism.

There's a new game feature, enabling you to take direct control of your hero units to deliver more personal damage, but most of the work has been under the bonnet. The AI has been improved. all the units have been tinkered with to assure a more balanced fight and more in-game tips are available to make the inhospitable future feel more welcoming. That's on top of refinements in the sound department, and the addition of more visual effects, better cut-scenes, scripting and - well, it sounds like pretty much everything's had a seeing to, to be honest.

We'll just have to wait until February to find out whether the duckling has turned into a swan, or if a big turd has just received the polishing of its life.













WINTER HYBORIAN-ATION

"The Age Of Conan? He can't be a day over 30!" laughs a jolly Jon Blyth

ageofconan.com | ETA: Spring 2007

JUST AS SCHWARZENEGGER came to power as governor of California, so Conan came to rule as King of Hyboria. And it's in this era of Robert E Howard's fictionalised history of the world that your galley will be shipwrecked and you'll be marooned on an island, and start levelling up like billy-o.

Age Of Conan: Hyborian Adventures does a number of things differently. For starters, an anti-WOW approach to combat has been adopted, resulting in a more handson hack-and-slash. Although don't expect anything Oblivion-y or Dark Messiah-y, since linked combos are the order of the day.

Product manager Erling Ellingsen explains: "Usually it's icons. You click on a series of icons, then sit back and watch. I'm not a big fan of that kind of system – it's tedious. In *Conan*, you have to take an active part in combat; striking your sword in

different directions, combos, shielding – you really fight." All interesting, but judgement will be reserved till we see how, and whether, this works in an MMO environment – especially in PvP.

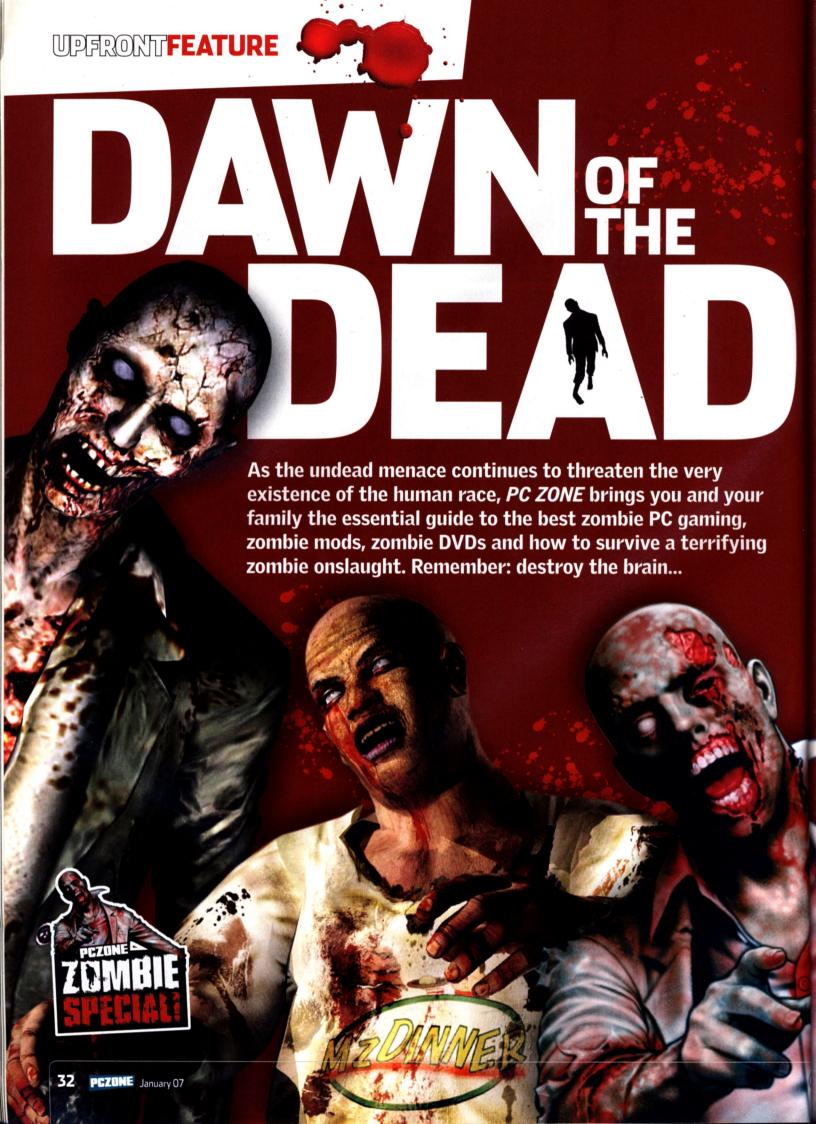
You may also have heard that *Hyborian Adventures* will uniquely start with a single-player mission, to bring you up to speed on the narrative and acquaint you with the gameplay. There's a strong story that the near-fanboy developers want to share, and the approach also avoids that daunting beginning of an MMO, where you're dropped into a playground and everyone's saying "wheres mission plz", and there are a few creepy people of suspiciously high levels hanging around outside the railings.

In reality, it's not single-player – you're still online; you're just sharing a very sparsely . populated start zone. "From a choice of race

at the beginning, you'll decide on one of four basic archetypes at level five: warrior, rogue, mage or priest." It's at level 20 that it gets more interesting, with less obvious classes such as the Heralds of Xotu, who become partially demonic due to their evil pacts. Magic is quite a twisted facet of the Hyborian legends; your soul can be corrupted, and in the case of the Heralds, reckless warriors will find themselves damned to hell. Priests aren't wallflower buff-merchants either. They heal in a cone effect, not a radius, so they're more involved with the surroundings – plus, they're pretty handy at dishing out damage.

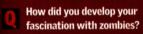
With drunken brawling, horseback combat, spell combos and a mature rating, AOC: Hyborian Adventures might be offering something new and exciting in a pretty crowded arena. Just as long as they keep a dance emote, we'll be happy.







To celebrate our free giveaway of the abridged version of The Zombie Survival Guide, we tracked down the author and celebrated undead expert Max Brooks on his favourite zombie game, where he gets his deadly insider info and whether we can look forward to Zombie! The Musical...



"The living dead have always frightened me. As a child, I watched George Romero's movies way too many times. They always left me wondering what I would actually do in the case of a real zombie attack."

How serious is the zombie threat? "Serious enough to take it seriously."

Have you played any particular zombie videogames? Resident Evil for example?

"Yes - the *Resident Evil* games are great fun, if not very realistic. I mean, in a real zombie attack, is the kill zone going to have weapons, ammunition and magical 'herbs' that bring back your health?



What about zombie movies? In the book you say you can't reveal which are the most realistic, but what's your favourite?

"Oh well, the first Dawn Of The Dead is a masterpiece, and, for that matter, anything by George Romero. Of course there were zombie movies before him, just like there were space movies before George Lucas. But Romero redefined the genre, and if his next movie is a gay zombie musical snuff film in French, that's fine with me."

Where have you obtained all your priceless 'insider' info on zombies?

'Tireless research and lack of a social life."

They say nails and hair grow after death - do they still grow on a zombie?

> "Not that I've seen, and thank god! The last thing we need is to combine zombies with another monster, hippies..."

Are zombies inherently evil?

They're neither evil nor good. They follow their instincts, like sharks or influenza. The morality we place on them comes from

Are we any closer to understanding why zombies prefer human flesh, and in particular, brains?

"Unfortunately, our study of the living dead is limited. Given how far we are from truly understanding conventional illness, it will be a long, long time before we fully

For you, what's the scariest thing about zombies?

"Their viral nature, their drive to consume and expand. There's no negotiation, no middle ground. Fighting zombies is fighting for survival and that, more than anything, terrifies to the core."

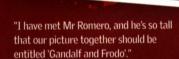
What does your dad Mel Brooks think about your dedication to the destruction of zombies?

"Like all proud fathers, he's just happy that I have a job."

Given your family heritage, can we expect any zombie comedy movies or perhaps a Broadway musical? "Hmmm... Perhaps, some day, when my work is done."

Have you met any other zombie luminaries such as George Romero or Tom Savini?

comprehend the zombie plague."



George Romero, the godfather of zombies.

THE LIVING DEA

What would your personal advice be to any PC ZONE reader facing a one-onone situation against a zombie? "Be prepared, not scared."

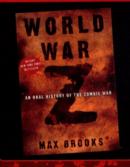
Can you tell us how your next book, World War Z - An Oral History of the Zombie War, can help save our lives? "WWZ is a cautionary tale, a warning of what might happen if we fail to organise before they rise.

Finally, what three things have inspired you or give you pleasure?

"Romero, razor-sharp blades and a good shot of rum." PEZ



Horror stories from the zombie war!



If you enjoyed (and indeed used) our free abridged version of The Zombie Survival Guide, then why not treat yourself, and any still-breathing members of your family and friends, to a copy of Max Brooks' latest book, published by Duckworth, World War Z – An Oral History of the Zombie War? After the zombie war came unthinkably close to destroying humanity, Max travelled the length and breadth of the USA and the world to preserve the eyewitness accounts of surviving men, women and children who came face-to-face with the living dead. Essential reading for all zombie historians.







Jamie Sefton creeps up behind the man in charge of the latest title in the frightening action-survival series *Alone In The Dark*

Who are ya?



NAME David Nadal DEVELOPER

Eden Games **POSITION**

Studio manager

AGE 35

FIRST GAME V-Rally

GAMES WORKED

ON BEFORE V-Rally 2, Kya: Dark Lineage **FAVOURITE GAME** Another World

Why are you so particularly keen to get away from the 'survival horror' label? After all, Alone In The Dark was the game that influenced Resident Evil...

'Simply because we wanted innovation in the game. The original AITD was one of the best games ever on PC, and I want to at least try to give the same feeling of playing it – the investigation, story and pacey action. However, I didn't want to be stuck in a genre - we want to break the established ideas of 'find key, open door, walk down corridor'. Of course, there will be corridors, but the experience will be one of wide-open environments with the aim for you simply to survive. One of my major inspirations is a movie..."

Not Uwe Boll's AITD movie?

"No! Don't talk about that one! No. the movie that's inspired us is Die Hard, because for me, it's the perfect survival model. You have Bruce Willis, who's alone, and he has nothing - he has to find a way to survive, using the items and environment around him, and this is exactly what we wanted to do. Everything is interactive, but it's more than just take your guns, ammo and armour and shoot at monsters. This is not the way we wanted to go. I prefer to call them 'enemies' anyway - this is because they might not be bad; some people, for example, might be just scared - but it's your choice if you want to kill them. The game is full of these kinds of choices, and although there aren't branching storylines as such, there will be multiple endings when a major revelation about your character is revealed."

The way that you can pick up and manipulate objects in the game world - for example, swing them

quickly to hit someone, throw them at something or just place them gently on the ground - works fantastically well. What kinds of interactive objects are there?

"Everything logically that you should be able to interact with, you'll be able to interact with in the game. We've modelled hundreds of objects - some of which are not particularly useful, but you'll be able to pick them up, examine them and do what you want with them. They're your tools, basically, and we want you to feel like you're touching the objects and that you have them in your hand. Many years ago, the shooter Trespasser tried to do this - it wasn't a very good game, but it was innovative at the time."

As you've set the game in Central Park, does this limit you or actually open up more possibilities?

"Well, Central Park is 4x1km, so it's huge - several hours' walking from south to north. We chose the park because you get the best of both worlds - there are busy, crowded NY areas, but in other quiet, forest areas, so you forget you're in a park. There are so many elements to it - we could make a game based just in the museum, for example. We've mapped the whole park with the same technology used in Test Drive Unlimited, with elevation maps you can drive on every single road and so on. We didn't want to lock the player into a narrow path - it's extremely exciting to have a game of this kind in a free-roaming environment."

AITD will be 'episodic'. Can you explain what you mean by this?

"We'll release the game episode by episode with a possible season DVD box set released afterwards - it's a huge amount of work. In a standard game of 10 or 20 hours of gameplay - and I'm



"We've been inspired by Die Hardit's the perfect survival model"





generalising here - you have a cracking first few hours, then a lot of hot air, then a good ending; the storyline is diluted. This can't work with an episodic structure, as each episode has to be self-contained, with different supporting characters and intensity - a full experience in 40-60 minutes, addictive and memorable, that you'll talk about with your friends and will make you want to play the next episode."

Finally, what scares you?

"Ah, well, this is why we're talking more about the enemies than showing them blood and big monsters isn't frightening any more. We've shown an enemy with a skull face, but you don't know anything else about it. The best bits of Doom are where you're in a corridor, and you hear sounds and you don't want to open that door! Fear is in your mind."



DAVID NADAL

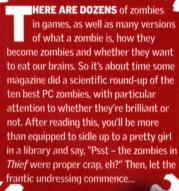
Where he turns for inspiration...



UPFRONTHOTSHOT This fast zombie is a bit keen. Not only does he throw himself into your path, he grabs onto your bonnet and swipes at you while you drive. How do you get him off? Simply drive into a wall, delivering a hearty catapult-and-crush effect. It's the only language they understand. Outside this area lies the forest - a first for the Half-Life universe. You've seen the photos of misty woods, with the fresh dew disturbed by the hoof of a sodding great Strider. You've seen the uncannily muscular-looking Hunters searching you out with their whirring through the morning mists. It's all just a short drive away. DEVELOPER Valve PUBLISHER Valve/EA WEB www.half-life2.com ETA Summer 07 PREVIOUSLY IN... 173 **0, WHAT DO** we know about *Episode Two* so far? We know it's outside the confines of City 17, which you've largely blown up. We know Alyx won't play such a major role – she's been too busy falling off cliffs and being unconscious, so you've got a friendly Vortigaunt for company instead. We know that a new enemy, the Hunters, will protect the Striders from your new weapon, the Strider-Buster. We know the Eastern European motif will carry through from the urban to the rural, and we know that the play area will be much larger and more quickly travelled across. It all points to excitement, so let's have a whistle-stop tour of our exclusive shot from Valve... SUIT PCZONE Jane







OVERALL QUALITY OF ZOMBIE:

These zombies are so fresh you can imagine the impotent human soul thinking, "What just happened there, then?" Whether they're out for brains, however, is forever an unknown factor.

STAND-OUT ZOMBIE MOMENTS:

When, after you have murdered a man fixing a pipe, a Chinese man says something portentous and the proper violence finally starts.

UNIQUE ZOMBIE LOGIC:

Upon death, a zombie corpse dissolves into nothingness due to the limits of an impending console release.

ZOMBIE RATING



OVERALL QUALITY OF ZOMBIE:

Too much skeleton for our tastes. And where did those claws come from?

STAND-OUT ZOMBIE MOMENTS:

You can walk cheerfully away from most zombies, while they bump into each other and groan. It's never nice to have the semi-living hurling themselves at your face, and the first time you spin around to face these frantic buggers is – if you, like us, favour frilly knickers – a real frilly-knicker-changing moment.

UNIQUE ZOMBIE LOGIC:

Your zombie future is a headcrab lottery. Will you be a lurcher, a lobber or a jittery sprinter? Whatever happens, you've got a crab's flaps parked on your nostrils, so it's all good.

ZOMBIE RATING



Zombification has its keep-fit benefits.



THE UNNECESSARY ZOMBIE

GAME: The Thief series.

METHOD OF ZOMBIFICATION:

Mystical artefact-related cataclysm.

OVERALL QUALITY OF ZOMBIE:

The undead got better in the third game, but why are they there? It's like someone said: "Thieves are cool! What else is cool?" Then someone walking through the boardroom said, "Zombies are cool!" and everyone said: "OK! Cool!"

STAND-OUT ZOMBIE MOMENTS:

When there are no zombies.

UNIQUE ZOMBIE LOGIC:

In the first *Thief*, zombies have been built into their own quarter of the city. It would have been nice if, when you went there, they'd started up zombie shops and a basketball league. This didn't happen.

ZOMBIE RATING





THE FLESH-HURLING ZOMBIE

GAME: Painkiller.

METHOD OF ZOMBIFICATION:

They're the residents of hell, actually.

OVERALL QUALITY OF ZOMBIE:

Well, they're not too bright, but that's part of the 'pure shooter' approach.

Totally realistic as far as zombies are concerned – and the addition of a stakegun to nail them to walls was welcome.

STAND-OUT ZOMBIE MOMENTS:

Wandering up to a zombie crawling on all fours (itself a minor undead coup) and stapling its head to the linoleum.

UNIQUE ZOMBIE LOGIC:

This is the first game to have zombie coffins that drop gold rings, like Sonic. Also, zombies is perhaps a misnomer. It's the afterlife – people are supposed to be dead and moving around.

ZOMBIE RATING





OVERALL QUALITY OF ZOMBIE:

Stubbs: we could have had it so much better.

Stubbs is a bright green zombie

- most zombies are content with a
pallid, bloodless grey. The game itself
offers no explanation for the skin
tones; perhaps during his 26 years
inhumation he developed moss chops.

STAND-OUT ZOMBIE MOMENTS:

You aren't an everyday zombie – you can throw your guts at people and fart

They're dead, they

UNIQUE ZOMBIE LOGIC:

Stubbs comes back to life 26 years after his murder, which is unusual enough, but he's also hankering after a romantic relationship. This is pretty unorthodox behaviour for the undead – except for Dracula, and even he couldn't do sex properly.

ZOMBIE RATING



THE LOOSE-HEADED ZOMBIE

GAME: Blood.

METHOD OF ZOMBIFICATION:

Overlord of the Cult of Tchernobog.

OVERALL QUALITY OF ZOMBIE:

Chamber music is music for zombies, and it's good to hear zombies actually say "Brraaainnnss", which is something all too often neglected in the milieu. Why is it that the only other time you hear zombies saying "Braaains" is when children (or Sefton, in the Supertest) are doing a shit impression?



STAND-OUT ZOMBIE MOMENTS:

Stab the zombies with a pitchfork. Keep going, that's right. Just a couple more... And the head's off! Amuse yourself for a couple of minutes by kicking the head around.

UNIQUE ZOMBIE LOGIC:

There's no real addition to zombie lore

– they're dead, they rise, they get set on
fire by your flare gun and die hilariously.
These are some classic zombies, sir.

ZOMBIE RATING







UPFRONTFEATURE





THE INTELLECTUAL ZOMBIE

GAME: Fallout 2.

METHOD OF ZOMBIFICATION:

Radioactive apocalypse.

OVERALL QUALITY OF ZOMBIE:

Now technically, he's a ghoul - but we always thought of him as a zombie. And any zombie called Harold has to be a cut-above. He's also very polite.

STAND-OUT ZOMBIE MOMENTS:

Well, it's just nice to meet a zombie with a basic grasp of etiquette, to be honest.

Even if the retail version had a bug that turned the ghouls - ironically enough - into lunatic killing machines, forcing you into a constant beleaguered retreat.

UNIQUE ZOMBIE LOGIC:

Zombies retaining their capacity for civilised thought might go against the grain, but why not? With this level of public ignorance, Harold could make a killing in PR work for the vitally challenged.



THE ACTOR ZOMBIE

GAME: The Movies.

METHOD OF ZOMBIFICATION:

Three hours in make-up.

OVERALL QUALITY OF ZOMBIE:

The zombies here are nothing less than a sham. Show them a bowl of brains, and far from patting their stomachs and groaning appreciatively, they'd probably squeal and hide in their trailer. Rubbish. Plus, the actors really overdo the armsforward thing, the massive hams.

STAND-OUT ZOMBIE MOMENTS:

When the zombie hangs around onset, not attempting to eat any brains whatsoever. See, rubbish!



UNIQUE ZOMBIE LOGIC:

The Movies takes a novel approach that zombies are a part of fiction, played by actors in movies about zombies. This post-modern take on the genre isn't even terrifying on the chin-stroking 'who's the real zombie in this situation' level.





A syringe-chucking lunatic, robbing you of 25 health points with each hit



THE NAZI ZOMBIE

GAME: Wolfenstein 3D.

METHOD OF ZOMBIFICATION:

The biological experiments of Nazi Dr Schabbs.

OVERALL QUALITY OF ZOMBIE:

"Zombies with guns? That's just wrong!" was the cry that went up as the happy gamers of 1992 entered the bowels of Castle Wolfenstein. "But ah! The guns protrude from the chest cavity!" said id. "That's OK then," we shrugged.

STAND-OUT ZOMBIE MOMENTS:

Probably when fighting the creator, rather than the creations. The stand-off



with Dr Frankenstein, if you will. A syringe-chucking lunatic, robbing you of 25 health points with each successful hit, the more grief he gave you the more grey and emotionless your little face became. He was making you a zombie too!

UNIQUE ZOMBIE LOGIC:

'Science gone wrong' is a typical scapegoat for zombification, normally from people who're scared that a new medical process could force our souls out of our very ears. We think that's what happened here.



THE 'OH, WOW! I'M LEVEL 15 TOO!' ZOMBIE

GAME: The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion.

METHOD OF ZOMBIFICATION:

Necromantic summonings.

OVERALL QUALITY OF ZOMBIE:

Oblivion zombies can transmit diseases, although you can't turn into a zombie yourself (boo). Elder Scrolls fans can be quite defensive if you ask them why their zombies don't eat brains. Their problem is, they don't understand why zombies are cool.

STAND-OUT ZOMBIE MOMENTS:

A Mage's Guild quest sees your companion running ahead, only to get skewered in a trap; when you get further on in the quest, you find him. Reanimated, drooling and utterly passive. It's a rare zombie gaming moment, because it doesn't involv you getting a chainsaw out and screaming with adrenalin.

UNIQUE ZOMBIE LOGIC:

Oblivion zombies bring us to a key question – when does a skeleton warrior have enough flesh to be reclassified as a zombie? Would a sausage taped over a patella be enough? PEZ

ZOMBIE RATING



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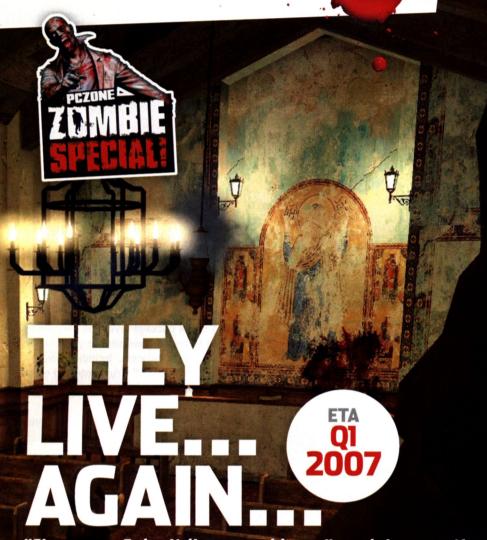
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UPFRONTFEATURE



"I'm sorry, I don't live round here," explains a patient Will Porter to some Lost Souls

DEVELOPER Black Widow Games PUBLISHER TBA WEBSITE www.blackwidowgames.com

"VE BEEN TO Eastern Europe. It seemed quite nice, if a bit stark: quite a few beards, devastatingly beautiful women, bears surprisingly thin on the ground. At no stage did I realise I was standing in zombie central – even if HL2, Resi 4 and, now, They Hunger: Lost Souls are insistent on the matter. Maybe it's the eerie Soviet architecture, or maybe there's just something in the water – whatever, there's certainly something rotten in the Baltic states.

They Hunger: Lost Souls is the commercial follow-up to Black Widow Games' stellar line of Hulf-Life mods – a heritage that cannot be ignored. It sets you up as a tourist recovering from a tragic accident who's sought ill-advised shelter in a monastery – only to discover (and you've probably seen this one coming) that the dead have woken.

"Our zombies range in looks from healthy living dead to fully decayed corpses. And because real zombies have a rather tough lifestyle they will, as a whole, be a rather damaged bunch," explains game designer Einar Saukas. "Plus, unlike most action games where you suddenly become a highly equipped super-soldier, in *Lost Souls* you're a simple tourist struggling to survive in a hostile environment. So you'll have to rely mostly on everyday objects utilised as melee weapons, old rusty pistols or rifles, improvised Molotov cocktails, TNT sticks and a few special weapons."

I GOT CHILLS...

As well as the ancient monastery complex you find yourself in (odd how undead monks are, by and large, scarier than undead nuns isn't it?), Black Widow intend to lead you into isolated farmsteads, fog-shrouded swamps, a salvage operation of sorts and even (gasp) a cemetery. Although quite why anyone would want to visit a moonlit graveyard during a time of increased zombie activity is yet to be explained.

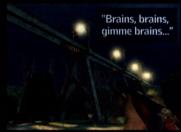
The 1960s setting, meanwhile, not only provides a more retro arsenal (and corresponding decreased rate of fire), but also some Cold War paranoia to knit



together a neat fabric of tension that goes beyond a dead man in a cupboard saying 'Urgh' and trying to kill you.

It won't all be chills though, there are also spills promised; following up on the marvellous moment that saw you running down countless moaning misters with a train in the original mods, you'll now be able to career around on a dilapidated tractor dealing the zombies' second deaths via the medium of squashing. I myself ran over a hedgehog with a tractor once, and can testify it's a plan that works.

Lovingly basted in Source engine, and hugely likely to be hurled at you through the wonders of the Web via



Steam, the only question that needs answering is whether these are traditional zombies controlled by forces beyond the veil, new-fangled 'plague' zombies or the nu-technology zombies provided by *Half-Life*? Einar Saukas is remaining tight-lipped. But will they at least like brains?

Saukas concludes: "According to practical experiments, we've observed real zombies and yes, they consistently demonstrate a preference for fresh brains. Since our goal is to provide a gameplay experience as realistic as possible, the zombies in *Lost Souls* will present exactly the same behaviour." At least some things are sacred...

GHOULS

Fancy a break from gaming? Ex-PC ZONER Paul Mallinson rises from the dead to list the ten best zombie DVDs of all time...



DAWN OF THE DEAD: DIRECTOR'S CUT (2004)

Dir: Zack Snyder UK DVD: Entertainment In Video

I had to toss a coin between this and George Romero's classic 1978 original. Zombie purists will hate me for it, but Snyder's remake-blockbuster revitalises the genre with a modern-day update of the gang-stuck-in-a-supermarketfighting-the-undead-masses plotline.



DAY OF THE DEAD (1985)

Dir: George A Romero UK DVD: Arrow Film Distributors Ltd

Arguably the darkest, most bleak, most nihilistic zombie film ever made - this, the third in Romero's Night/Dawn/Day/Land quadrilogy, is a showcase of gruesome skin-tearing splatter, set in the claustrophobic confines of an underground military bunker. Watch it and wince.



HELL OF THE LIVING DEAD (1980)

Dir: Bruno Mattei **US DVD: Anchor Bay**

Brilliantly cheesy Italian zombie nonsense about a SWAT team fighting through dense jungle to reach the source of a zombie outbreak. En route, they witness all kinds of gruesome spectacles, including an old woman who has her innards eaten by a zombie cat.



LET SLEEPING CORPSES LIE (1974)

Dir: Jorge Grau US DVD: Anchor Bay

Despite starting slowly, this hypnotic horror classic (also known as Breakfast At The Manchester Morgue) is one of the creepiest and goriest zombie films around, and also has real novelty value because it's set in and around Manchester in the bell-bottomed '70s.



NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1990)

Dir: Tom Savini **UK DVD: Columbia Tristar**

This is the guy who did the gore effects for Romero's Dawn and Day movies; here, he's remaking Romero's classic Night Of The Living Dead. High tension, great acting, subtle scares, shocking gore - and an interesting new spin on the hillbilly mop-up at the end.



RE-ANIMATOR (1985)

Dir: Stuart Gordon

US DVD: Elite Entertainment Darkly funny and delightfully obscene, Stuart Gordon's Re-Animator still remains shocking and hilarious some ten years after its initial release. Talking severed heads, lobotomised zombie henchmen, mad scientists and lashings of inventive gore.



THE RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD (1985)

Dir: Dan O'Bannon

UK DVD: Tartan Video

With the tagline, 'They're Back... They're Hungry... And They're Not Vegetarian', if you like the idea of naked zombie punk chicks writhing around in mud, then this is for you. Famous for its crazy humour ("I hit the f***ing brains!"), and talking zombies with a desire to eat "brains!".



SHAUN OF THE DEAD (2004)

Dir: Edgar Wright **UK DVD: Universal**

F***-a-doodle-doo! Simon Pegg and friends fumble their way to survival through the swarming suburbs of London, spoofing every zombie movie ever made and hopping from one bloody set-piece to the next. A modern Brit-flick that was both smart and funny.



BRAINDEAD (1992)

Dir: Peter Jackson UK DVD: Universal

Before Tolkien, Peter Jackson made this over-the-top zombie bloodfest - a light-in-tone but heavy-on-giblets tale about a monkey bite turning an old granny into a killer corpse, whose bite then turns her victims into zombies. A shambling triumph.



ZOMBIE FLESH EATERS (1979)

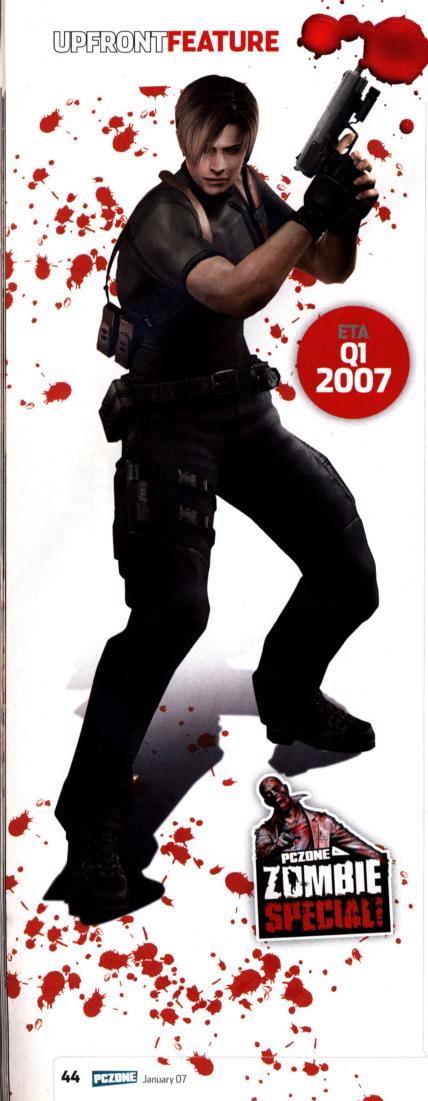
Dir: Lucio Fulci

US DVD: Blue Underground

Infamous Italian zombie splatter epic that was banned in the UK during the 1980s Mary Whitehouse years. It's superbly made for a cheapo horror flick and has many classic set-pieces, such as a zombie fighting a shark underwater – and winning!



Paul Mallinson is webmaster of the website www.sick-films.com and is considered to be one of the UK's leading authorities on the subject of zombie stuff.



RESIDENT EVIL 4

To celebrate the impending PC invasion of zombies, mutant villagers and insane monks, the *PC ZONE* team describe their favourite gore-splattered moments from Capcom's greatest survival-horror game...

Warning! Spoiler alert!

DEVELOPER Capcom **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **WEBSITE** www.capcom.com/re4





JAMIE SEFTON: CHAINSAW SHOCKER

"It's a bit in an early village scene, when the Eastern-European hordes began hunting me down in the wooden outhouses and I heard a chainsaw rev up outside. Suddenly, what I can only describe as a rustic hoodie burst into the room, and without hesitation, rushed forward and plunged the chainsaw into my neck. A few seconds of horrifying and gory chainsaw-meeting-flesh later and Leon Kennedy's head was completely severed from his body, which then lifelessly slumped to the floor. Stunned, I stared at the screen waiting for my character to get up - he didn't, of course, as a cut-off head tends to hamper your everyday abilities. Slowly, 'You are dead' floated into view. It was truly shocking - not just one of Resi 4's highlights, but one of the best gaming moments ever."





SUZY WALLACE: LOCAL TROUBLE

"Normally, being shacked up with a hot chick wouldn't be so bad (for a male character, that is), but when the situation sees Leon, Ashley and Luis trapped inside a house surrounded by villagers, things start to go horribly wrong. Initially, pushing cabinets in front of windows to stop any creepy villagers from entering and taking out any sneaky ones who've managed to get in seems easy, but then things hot up considerably as the assault starts to come from the upstairs level too. There follows a few minutes of mad panic as you rush from window to window, frantically pushing ladders away, trying to prevent any that have made it inside from getting their grubby mitts on you or the others. Fighting to stay alive had my pulse racing... Until I was quite literally saved by the bell. Proper heart-pounding stuff."

A few seconds of horrifying and gory chainsaw-meeting-flesh later and Leon Kennedy's head was completely severed from his body



"I played through Resi 4 with my friend first time around, and I was horrified when he didn't want to rescue the wolf that had got his leg caught in the bear trap. I got more annoyed than can reasonably be justified, and we had this big pseudo-argument featuring lines such as, "But he might help us!" and, "What, by taking us to a well that a little boy fell down? He'll turn into a Cerberus!" Basically, I'm soppy for dogs. So, when I won the argument and the wolf came back to take on El Gigante, I felt like the most vindicated girl's blouse in the world."





"It happens guite early on, but one of my favourite moments from Resi 4 is the first time the villagers start chucking sticks of dynamite at you. Specifically, the first time you manage to shoot the explosive before it leaves their hand, thereby turning them into a singed pile of mushy flesh on the floor and sending everybody around them flying. For even more kudos, you can shoot the things in mid-air. Well, what do they expect to happen when they chuck that amount of explosive material around with such reckless abandon? It's damn careless is what it is. There's none of that nambypamby ultra-slow knife-throwing House Of The Dead nonsense either - Resi 4's sharpshooting is all about skill. And if they balls-up the mouse controls in this conversion, I'll be mad."





WILL PORTER: DUCK, DODGE AND DIVE

"Which bit to choose? Sniping the iron bars encasing a trapped Ashley while mad zombie monks slowly encroach on her? Or perhaps even the brilliant mumbling chant noise they make? Or that bit when I was gazing through a rustic window at a zombie farmer with his wife mindlessly clawing at its frame and they broke through and started guzzling on my neck? Or the bit where you're suddenly on the back of a jet ski lobbing spears at a sleek sea monster that's taken temporary sanctuary in a nearby lake? No, the defining moment of Resi 4 for me was the moment I'd lined up a perfect head shot on a rural shambler, before he quickly ducked out of the way, increased his speed and had me in his cold, clammy grip. Completely unexpected, completely brilliant."

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Meet the cockney zombie hordes from *Hellgate: London*

www.hellgatelondon.com | ETA: Q2 2007

"MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I'm a zombie," sing the hundreds of flesh-dripping, undead enemies from ex-Blizzard guy and godlike *Diablo* creator Bill Roper's latest action RPG *Hellgate: London.* It won't mean a jot to you if you live outside of our glorious nation's capital, but there's something unavoidably amusing about seeing a level set in Tottenham, north London, teeming with the undead among decaying, detritusstrewn streets. American Bill has definitely done his research.

For our special zombie issue, Flagship Studios sent us an inbox-crushing hi-res selection of gorgeous zombie shots from the game, showing off the fact that not only does it contain zombies, but there's a whole caste of them called the Necros. As a defender of humanity, you'll have to fend off Blood Zombies, Grave Lurkers, Flesh Eaters, Nightmares, Siege Fiends and Grotesques – the last of which, in addition to attacking you personally, reach inside their rotting guts to throw exploding, flesheating parasites in your direction.

Fortunately, you'll have access to over 20 fully moddable rifles, pistols, swords and heavy weapons, plus a healthy array of hell beast-vanquishing spells, and be able to choose from three (so far announced) player classes – the God-bothering Knights Templar, the dark magic-loving, demonic Cabalists and the ex-military, FPS-friendly Hunters. We'll have more on *Hellgate: London* in the next issue – unless the Maggot Spawners of Crouch End get us first...







1

HOT SHOTS CLIME BARKER

DEVELOPER Alchemic Productions **PUBLISHER** Codemasters **WEB** www.codemasters.com/jericho **ETA** Q3 2007

L-KHALI'S BACK. IF you're in the occult warrior profession, you'll know what we're talking about. Al-Khali's the fortress that appears every 100 years, trapping visitors and subjecting them to an immortal life of torture. It's all very Clive Barker. Unlike his previous game, *Undying*, the storyline here is all Barker's work, and as you progress through the fortress you'll be travelling backwards through the time zones where the cursed city has made its appearances. The longer its occupants have been in there, the longer they've had to get ripped apart and rebuilt, which isn't good for the sanity. By the time you get to the evil heart of the fortress, you've got some messed up and many-centuries-old denizens on your hands. You can always rely on Clive Barker for inconceivable evil, suffering and an apocalypse or two...





GORDON IS A COIN-OP

Exclusive! Daniel Robson shoves his ven into arcade stunner Half-Life 2: Survivor, recently unleashed upon Japanese gamers



48 PCZONE January 07

HILE VIDEOGAME **ARCADES** in Britain and America are sinking ever deeper into a miserable slump, Japan still offers an abundance of innovative and lucrative - new machines. And among these, Half-Life 2: Survivor, Taito Corporation's arcade reworking of Valve's PC masterpiece, stands out as a thing of beauty. It's a joy to behold - and we haven't just beheld it; we've played it.

Plunging players into the role of Gordon Freeman, HL2: Survivor's story mode offers the heady, adrenalindrenched atmosphere of the original title's action set-pieces, over ten chapters of all-new gameplay. The game also has a networked mission mode ('Collect the gems!' 'Escape!') and an online battle mode that pits players against other gamers in arcades anywhere around the country, complete with an NESYS card so you can save your progress. This last addition has made Half-Life 2: Survivor something of an anomaly in Japan, as



Combine technology, for sure

the game's popularity is continuing to grow some six months after its release.

THRONE-OMENAL

"It's not normal," admits Takashi Naito, senior general manager of amusement machines at Taito. "Usually, when we release a new machine, the income from players starts very high, but decreases gradually as the machine gets older. But with Half-Life 2: Survivor, the income is gradually going up, because of the online mode's appeal."



Equal (special) ops

Battle mode enables ladies to get Combine suits too



Behold the manga-ification of City 17. In battle mode, players can choose between four character classes - ranger, soldier, sniper and engineer - each with its own set of strengths and weaknesses, and both male and female versions. In two teams of four, players compete online against opponents in arcades across Japan - it's highly tactical stuff, coming across like a bizarre mixture of Team Fortress and Half-Life 2: Deathmatch in tight, recognisable environments. Other differences? Well, the stun stick has mysteriously had its power turned off, and there's that big old radar and all manner of other mysterious power bars but most important of all, death by flying toilet is now far more unlikely.



Twin joysticks are used to move and

fire, floor pedals to crouch and jump.

Online play is nothing new in Japan's arcades, but HL2:S's straightforward gameplay and outlandish cabinet have helped it secure a place in gamers' pulsating hearts. A brightly coloured throne, the back of which glows in a worryingly sexy fashion, plonks you in front of a 32-inch screen and into a 5.1 sound set-up; and while the double joystick and foot-pedal controls look daunting, they're surprisingly intuitive, with the sticks used to move, aim and fire, and the pedals for crouching and jumping. Story mode offers a swift learning curve, pausing occasionally to talk you through the controls and explain objectives in a mollycoddling but skippable fashion.

PHYSICS OUT, GUNS IN

Of course, Story mode doesn't offer much story. While Naito insists the game's concept is the same as that of the original, arcade necessity waves a spirited goodbye to many of Half-Life 2's features, with brainbattering physics-puzzles replaced by out-and-out shooting and bright green arrows showing you where to go. Another wild difference is that each bullet on target generates a neon 'Hit!' sign on or around a Combine's person, and a cheery 'Defeat' one when they snuff it. The only main nugget of story is the G-Man's intro movie; Alyx isn't present as a fellow in-game

character, gravity gunning is scarce and the action is largely derived from the original game's set-pieces.

Come face to face with Combine

soldiers. And then shoot them.

But that's no cause for despair. as Taito have delivered a solid, fun game that echoes the technical innovation of its source (ahem) material perfectly. Each chapter has a simple aim, such as 'Kill Combines', and a few familiar faces - such as Father Grigori (under a bright green 'Support' sign) and the Airboat - make their presence felt, meaning that while it certainly isn't high art, it is a hefty slice of fun. It also offers great value, with chapters taking several minutes to complete and then continuing at half the initial play price - a mere Y1,000 (£4.50) saw us through a whole hour of play.

EXPORT: DENIED

Sadly, although Half-Life 2: Survivor's remarkable success is opening up new avenues for Japan's arcades, it's unlikely to revive Britain or America's withered

Brain-battering physics-puzzles are replaced by out-and-out shooting



industry any time soon. Naito told PC ZONE that the game is unlikely to appear outside of Japan because of its high cost and the difficulty of providing online play. "The cost of US game Target: Terror may be around \$5,000 (£2,700), but Half-Life 2: Survivor is more than double that," he says. "Furthermore, the Internet infrastructure is not there. We considered having a standalone version of the game, with a battle mode networked within the arcade but not against other arcades. But it's not so attractive to players, which means the income would be less."

While HL2:S may never reach Blighty, players in Japan are likely to see a sequel before too long. The lucky sods. If you want to catch the latest adventures of Gordon Freeman, better reserve those plane tickets...



Exclusive! Steve Hogarty goes hands-on with the true future of online shooters...

> **DEVELOPER** Splash Damage/id Software **PUBLISHER** Activision WEBSITE www.guakewars.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 170

> > T'S A PREDICTABLE way to introduce the article, I know. We've mentioned it every time we've brushed up against *Enemy* Terriotory: Quake Wars - but Splash Damage's studios are in Bromley, Kent, a place that wouldn't be missed if it spontaneously sank into the ground tomorrow. It literally goes: kebab shop, corner shop, tanning salon, birthplace of one of the hottest-looking shooters of 2007, then a supermarket. In fact, so hidden is the office in which Splash Damage have been hammering away at their latest multiplayer masterpiece, that I couldn't find it. Turns out it's tucked right behind the supermarket, meaning it's probably one of the most unassuming and uninspiring places I've ever been.

That is, until I get inside and see that what they're working on is both inspiring and assuming. After introducing himself, co-founder and creative director Paul Wedgwood submits me to a brief tour of their modest and dimly lit office space. This includes a glass vault reminiscent of Magneto's prison in which to house their massive 'Megaserv' server which not only hosts their frequent LAN games, but also renders the gigabyte-straddling mega-textures used to make



actually improved

Maps are streamlined, conflict areas are focused

Vehicle physics are best of any online shooter

Has giant walking tanks, but is modest about it

Bewildering for beginners



UPFRONTHANDS-ON



Quake Wars look so detailed – and the delightful corridor of concept art, which displayed some rejected character ideas such as the mutilated female Strogg.

"Yeah, we didn't think that one was very appropriate," admits a passing coder, noticing my morbid interest. The short walk back to the meeting room then takes us past a cabinet displaying award after well-deserved award for Splash Damage's previous title, Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory. In all, it's really not a bad place to work.

QUAKEWALK

Having sat me in front of a projector screen, Wedgwood wastes no time in getting to the interesting stuff. He tells me how the visuals have improved since their astounding E3 movie, before taking the easier route of loading up the Valley map and letting me see for myself. He really isn't lying, and while the difference might not be monumental, it's certainly noticeable.

The terrain texture is far more defined, right out to the horizon. The mega-texture ensures there are no repeating tiles either – compare that to a game like *Oblivion*, in which detail only exists up to a certain point before turning into a distant blurry green texture. The game's maps, in terms of size, are roughly on par with *Battlefield's*, but in terms of scale and design, *Quake Wars* contains the most elaborately constructed maps of any online shooter.

Thanks to the mega-texture technology, fogging is only ever used aesthetically too – and it all runs on a machine that can run *Quake 4*. This is a major technical achievement for PC

The Quake Wars engine never skimps on detail, indoors or not.

gaming, and as if it needs stating, one that obliterates any notions I had of the Doom engine being a useless, clunky shadow simulator.

QUAKE ZERO

"With each of the maps in *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars,*" Wedgwood explains, "we retell one of the battles which were a turning point in the runup to the retaliation against Stroggos in *Quake II*. For example, in *Quake II* we know that Earth was able to retaliate against Stroggos using slipgates, so one of our maps features the GDF discovering slipgate technology. *Quake Wars* is a brand new id Software game, it's a pure multiplayer online combat game."

Splash Damage have worked closely with id to ensure proper homage is paid to the classic FPS franchise, shown by the presence of a clock on the meeting-room wall set to Central Standard Time (aka Texas o'clock), should anybody ever need to make a long-distance phone-call to Mr Carmack.

"The game charts the initial invasion of Earth by the Strogg," Wedgwood tells me, "so in that sense you can think of it as *Quake Zero*, but with *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*-style

gameplay. Because we started with the Doom engine as a foundation, the player-physics and the first-person weapons are as perfect as they've always been in id games – it's a more reliable combat experience.

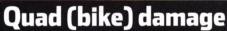
"And of course, placing *Enemy Territory* in the *Quake* universe has given us the ability to have asymmetrical gameplay. The Strogg race use advanced alien technology and the Global Defence Force use more conventional weapons – contemporary tanks, rocket launchers and grenades, that kinda stuff."

DIVE IN

With the basics thoroughly conveyed, and the game's limbo screen beginning to burn into my retinas, Wedgwood begins the demonstration proper. In order to show me exactly how the mechanics of the shooter operate, Valley is emptied of allies and foes alike, and Wedgwood's character stands alone in the GDF base. Currently, the GDF objective is to construct a bridge (well, repair a broken bridge) about 100-yards down the road in order to move their mobile command post forward. On the far side of this destroyed bridge is the tunnel you may



"The game charts the initial invasion of Earth by the Strogg – think of it as *Quake Zero*, but with Wolfenstein: ET-style gameplay Paul Wedgwood, co-founder & creative director, Splash Damage



How Splash Damage are putting the 'fizz' back in 'fizzicks'



Because we started out with a multiplayer game engine," explains Paul Wedgwood as he hops on to a nearby quadbike (in Quake Wars), "our vehicle physics from have been built to work with our network system." He demonstrates by tearing around the countryside. "The maps have been built to include lots of routes which you can only take with specific vehicles, so there are certain jumps and trick points to get across ravines and stuff." The man doesn't lie either, these vehicles handle superbly - feeling more like GTA than anything else.

Wedgwood continues the display by hunting down a Trojan, the GDF's amphibious APC, before systematically shooting off four of its six tyres. He then hops back into the crippled vehicle and floors it, forcing the disabled machine to slowly drag its arse-end down the road in a shower of sparks, wheels screeching and metal scraping. The interior has been modelled with intimate detail too, allowing you to look around and admire the workmanship of the Earthling technology, under threat from the cheap Strogg foreign imports.



"I certainly hope no sneaky flying things are around here."



remember from the E3 trailer, the one that hotshot-pilot flew through. The Strogg objective is simply to defend.

ACTION STATIONS

"You'll see that at the moment the mission displayed in the top-left corner of the screen is to secure the bridge," Wedgwood explains, gesturing at the HUD. "But if I go to the bridge and create something that would be a threat, say for example a Strogg antiarmour turret..." He brings up the console, turns on noclip mode and flies to the opposite side of the bridge before spawning a black, menacing-looking, semi-organic gun.

'That's a threat to my team because it will attack any vehicles that come through," explains Wedgwood as he zips back to the GDF base. "You can see that it doesn't appear on my command map because I don't have radar up yet. My team hasn't gathered any intelligence about the fact that it exists, so currently my task is still just to secure the bridge. But one of the things that I can do as a Covert-Ops character class (responsible for gathering intelligence) is to deploy radar. And so if I deploy radar..

Wedgwood selects the deployable radar from his weapon list, and an RTSstyle grid appears on the ground in front of him. The interface is instantly recognisable, glowing a healthy green when it's safe to deploy it in a given area and an angry red when you'd be blocking a path. Once placed, it can even be rotated,





Splash Damage unveil Enemy Territory: Quak Wars. People close by

As it approaches ase, Quake Wars looks better than ever



2001

2003

2005



It takes you by the hand without restraining you in any way.

Having armed me with the basics of Quake Wars' inner workings, and noticing how anxious I am to begin playing, Wedgwood leads me to the testing room which is already populated with people who look like they just might live there.

First up is the Valley map I'd just been shown, and I choose to play as a GDF engineer. "Construct the bridge," my HUD cheerfully informs me. But it isn't that easy, and within minutes the Strogg are already setting up a rocksolid defence by the bridge. By the time I get my head around how it all works, the rest of my team have managed to hold off the enemy attack, build the bridge, move through the tunnel and set up camp on the other side. For all its attempts to make itself

accessible, the first ten minutes of Quake Wars are simply chaotic.

"We were worried that the Strogg's bigger weapons looked far cooler than the GDF's," an unhelpful nearby tester chimes in, as a terrifyingly massive beam of orange death from orbit strikes the ground nearby and slowly drags super-heated destruction across our base, killing me and everything else in its path. "But we realised that everybody will get to appreciate them," he laughs.

GET IN MY CAR

Respawning amid the battle once more, I spy Wedgwood standing next to the Anansi gyrocopter. "Get in!" he shouts, oddly, as he is sitting next to me and could've just asked politely. I comply, sprinting in terror towards the air vehicle. So much is going on around me



With a game this huge, can it possibly be modded?



Arnout van Meer, Splash Damage's co-founder and technical director, explains: "Technical changes to the game will remain fairly easy as the game code is very accessible. There's a lot of potential for smaller gameplay mods, though a bigger project would take a lot of effort." Richard Jolly, co-founder and art director continues. "It's the assets which take time. To go from concept to high-poly, then low-poly model to in-game, with animations on top - as well as multiple characters and vehicles and about two weeks work per asset - it's a lot of work.

"We knew we wanted to provide really great mod-making support," adds Paul Wedgwood. "Richard and Arnout and their teams have been updating a Wiki page that we run internally. It's like Wikipedia, but with descriptions of absolutely everything you can do technically with the game engine and the tools that we've developed. Making a mega-texture for example, even a novice with no knowledge of the art side of things could read the documentation and be told which widgets to use in Photoshop, and how to use Terragen and those sorts of things." Having been modders themselves, Splash Damage know exactly what modders want.



that it really is quite overwhelming. Strogg infiltrators zip over buildings with their jetpack-style Icarus machines, gun-turrets blast round after round at approaching targets. everywhere things are just exploding. Despite the fact that it doesn't support as many players as games like Battlefield, the objective-based maps create focus points, battlefronts on which everybody can be found. There's very little reason to be anywhere else on the map, meaning it's insanely action-packed.

"Don't shoot me," orders (or pleads) Wedgwood to the other testers as we lift off and go on a brief tour of the map, a wise move considering the carnage below.

ROGER, ROGER

At first, it seems to handle like a helicopter: the Anansi dips forward, diving towards the lake surface before levelling off and speeding across the water and under a bridge. The Anansi's onboard systems, which I assume are programmed to feel abject terror, beep endlessly, thoroughly unappreciative of Wedgwood's near-terrain piloting skills.

He explains that by holding the control key, you can unlock your gun reticule and fire your guns and rockets in any direction - of course, this means effectively taking your hands off the Anansi's wheel, and as such it's the reserve of the more







also a shimmering body of water, a village, and once inside the bio-dome the detail doesn't relent.

Quake Wars' interiors are just as astounding as its exteriors. The Strogg begin their attack in the south-east corner of the map, working their way through the village to destroy the GDF jamming device before asking their orbiting overlords to drop a massive mining laser on the map's central island. They use this to blast open the doors of the bio-dome, before planting explosives inside the massive underground complex.

ALIEN FRIEND

This time around. I side with the alien scum. With no direction from anybody at all (I'm beginning to get the hang of things now) I deploy a strategic strike gun, a massive Strogg missile launcher. I then make my way to the GDF base on the other side of the village and paint a nice big laser tag on the GDF spawn point. That's right kids, I'm a bona fide arsehole. Back at my missile launcher, a missile has launched (gasp) and it begins to arc slowly and ominously through the sky, leaving a billowing black trail of smoke.

"Everything in the game has a counter," continues Wedgwood. "Every ability, tool and item has something you can do as an enemy player to stop them getting away with doing that same thing again."

The opposition

Not really the opposition at all, reckon Splash Damage...



Two multiplayer online shooters, two near-future settings - so what do Splash Damage make of EA's Battlefield 2142? "We announced about two-and-a-halfyears ago that we were working on Enemy Territory: Quake Wars," states Wedgwood. "We said it would be a futuristic game set in 2060. We released concept art of our walkers and our flyers and all that sort of stuff - then about six months later there was an announcement from EA..." he sighs, and does a sort of hand motion to finish the sentence that dare not speak its name. "That's pretty much my take on it, you know?" Erm, we think we know.

'We released Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory in the same year that Battlefield 1942 was released," he continues. "Then shortly after we released Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory, they released their Secret Weapons Of WWII expansion pack, and it had character classes and the command map and all that stuff. So really, we're honoured to see our features spread out into the community, but I don't think we're in competition with anybody specifically.

"We're fans of the Battlefield series, and of Tribes and Unreal Tournament and indeed any multiplayer game - for a while we were even running Splash Damage Battlefield servers. We had fun playing their games, but they're very different."



A recently deployed GDF anti-missile turret ends my missile's flight prematurely, leaving a spectacular explosion and a magnificently shaped cloud in the sky.

"That's the case across the whole game," Wedgwood laughs. Unhindered, my missile would've decimated the enemy forces, but the GDF's foresight ensured that wouldn't happen. As the round flows on, we end up breaching the GDF bio-dome and becoming

embroiled in a game of plant the bomb/ defuse the bomb. Indoors, this game smacks of Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory more than ever, and the solid engine nails the feeling of proper corridor shooting in a way few other games can.

Wedgwood is right when he claims the id engine provides a reliable combat experience. This is classic Quake, but on a whole new level. We won, by the way. The victorious jeers of the testers met with a tut from Wedgwood: "Could we please not use the term 'teabagging' in front of the journalist?" he pleads.

NEW DAWN

Once ejected back into the bleak Bromley evening, I grab a sandwich and head for the station. Having arrived with the preconception that I'd be playing a game not entirely unlike BF2142, I've been well and truly proven wrong. Every map tells a story, featuring progression, changing objectives and moving frontlines. It adds several more layers of depth to an increasingly rich universe, and it's the by-product of a holy union between Splash Damage, those connoisseurs of multiplayer gaming, and the legendary id. What's more, it's stunningly beautiful to boot. Not only is Quake Wars a huge technical achievement, but it looks set to be one of the most refined, polished and successful online shooters the PC has ever seen. Be excited. PEZ

It's set to be one of the most polished and refined online shooters for the PC







SAM FISHER'S CHOICE





NVIDIA GEFORCE 7 7600GT

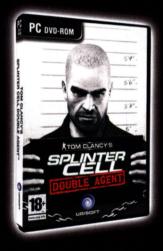
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Driving lesson

HERE ARE SOME people (yes I'm looking at you, Daily Mail reader) that would have you believe that playing games is a complete waste of time. That the only thing that could possibly be learned from sitting in front of a screen with a controller in your hand is how to murder and maim in cold blood.

Of course, they're wrong. Whether it's knowing which types of weapons the soldiers used in WWII, to learning tactical moves that even Sun Tzu would be proud of, there's a ton of information that your brain can soak up while your fingers are frantically clicking away. And some of it even has practical purposes.

Case in point... I had the recent pleasure of being invited along to a promotional day at Silverstone where I got to drive a rally car, Audi RS4, Ferrari 360 and Porsche 911. Despite only driving a rundown, clapped-out banger in real life, I went on to win both the Ferrari and the Porsche events. My reason? I'm putting it down to my experience with GTR2 and my trusty force-feedback steering wheel. Nice one, GTR-sensei!



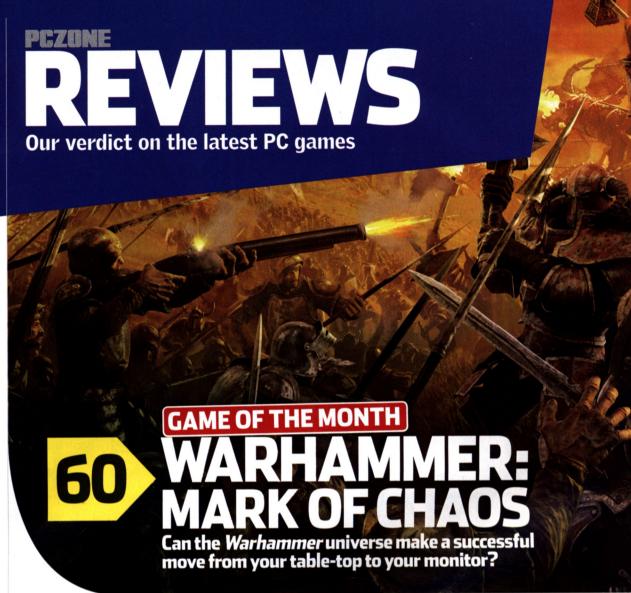
Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must



PC ZONE Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of the honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...





The PC ZONE Awards







RECOMMENDED (75-89%)

Pretty, pretty, pretty, Any game that turns ZONE's head is worthy of your love.

DUMP (0-19%)

Don't shirk your duty - it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

one, stop and buy it AND THE REST

The best games ever. If

you're lucky enough to see

CLASSIC (90%+)



ONLINE ONLY Don't have an Internet connection? Then you're wasting vour time. Move along please

EXPANSION PACK See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the

expansion. We know - life's not fair.

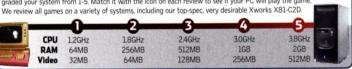
Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

ON THE DVD

Good news!

The PC Class System

Not all games are created equal, so how do you know if your PC's up to the job? Using real science, we've graded your system from 1-5. Match it with the icon on each review to see if your PC will play the game



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In a time of war only the greatest heroes will stand victorious. Sadly, none of them were available so we had to send Martin Korda into action instead

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AT A GLANCE...

An RTS based on the Warhammer license with a plethora of excellent tactical and RPG elements, though not without its problems.

System requirements

HOW IT STACKS

MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR 91%

WARHAMMER: 32%

LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II

HY ARE THEY always Scottish? Dwarves, that is. I've often wondered who it was that originally decreed that these stunted beardy hedonists should speak with a Glaswegian twang? Same goes for elves pompous, meticulously spoken, stupid feather caps; and what about humans unreliable weak-minded fools who unwittingly find themselves as the only race capable of opposing a darkness that threatens to enslave the world.

As you've probably already guessed and if you're already a Warhammer fan, you'll already know - Mark Of Chaos is an RTS that indulges these fantasy mainstays in a world where humanity. elves and dwarfs must hold back the tide of the rampaging Hordes Of Chaos or monstrous, gravelly-voiced bad people with large axes for the uninitiated.

Despite its somewhat predictable premise, Mark Of Chaos proves itself to be a deep and compelling romp through a world ravaged by war, perfectly complemented by an excellent plot and two semi open-ended campaigns utilising rolling resources and offering both optional and story-essential missions. So, we're off to a pretty good start. Which is always nice.

WAR'S A BREWIN'

Mark Of Chaos kicks off just months after Emperor Magnus's victory against the Hordes, plopping you into the conflictravaged Warhammer universe and instantly immersing you in a world where diametrically opposed factions attempt to cleave each other into submission.

With two campaigns on offer, you can choose to guide either the Empire or the Hordes Of Chaos to glory. Playing as the Empire sees you assuming the mantle of Stefan von Kessel, a commander in the Empire's army, branded with the Mark Of Chaos as a child due to his daddy and grandpappy's dabblings with the dark side. As the campaign progresses, you'll discover the truth behind your family's past, one that will ultimately forge your destiny and that of your people - and see you uniting with (and commanding) both elves and dwarves.

If that's all sounding a bit too nambypamby and you fancy ripping out some entrails while sacking villages instead, then you'll probably be wanting to head straight

for the Hordes Of Chaos (backed up by the Greenskins and the Skaven) campaign, a rampaging romp of destruction and death that sees you attempting to wipe out the Empire and install yourself as the new champion of the Chaos gods.

A NEW CHAPTER

Whichever side you end up opting for, the campaign's format remains unchanged. Divided into chapters, each segment presents you with a map dotted with towns, caves and enemy strongholds, which must be liberated from your foe. In this sense, Mark Of Chaos bears more than a passing resemblance to Rise Of Nations: Rise Of Legends, tasking you with moving your army through the land with the chance to deviate from your main objective via optional side quests.

Though Mark Of Chaos never quite manages to hit the same ethereal heights as Big Huge Game's closet classic, and while the campaign map is so ugly that the likes of Medieval II would only ask it out as part of a pig-orientated dare, there's still a game of genuine intelligence to be found here, an RTS bristling with ideas and hours of slaughtering entertainment.



This is a game of genuine intelligence, an RTS bristling with ideas and hours of slaughtering entertainment

Once you reach a hotspot on the campaign map, the action switches to a 3D battlefield in which your upgradeable Hero units lead your troops into action. Each Hero has an abundance of abilities and spells that can be called upon, ranging from scorching fireballs to magical shields that protect an entire regiment from enemy onslaughts. They can also pick up dropped magical items from the battlefield, which further swell their powers. Much like Warcraft III and Rise Of Legends, these Hero units are integral to your success and used shrewdly, can turn the tide of even the bleakest of battles.

Before hostilities commence, you're given the opportunity to position your troops within a deployment zone. However, unlike $\mathit{Med}\ \mathit{II}$ where your pre-battle positioning is paramount to eking out an advantage over your enemy, Mark Of Chaos's deployment phase often proves about as productive as trying to hack off someone's head with a nail file (don't try it

at home kids, it bloody hurts). And with the majority of missions tasking you with exploring the map, your starting position often proves obsolete, though defensive levels are a notable exception.

THINK ABOUT IT

While your army's starting position often proves unimportant to a level's outcome, the same certainly can't be said for the strategies you employ during skirmishes. Forced to think tactically at every turn, there's a genuine sense of strategy from the moment you advance to the moment the final foe falls.

Missile troops are deadly when raining down volleys on your foes, but leave them isolated and they'll be flanked faster than Daniel O'Donnell in an old people's home. Maybe faster. What's more, with the game thankfully shying away from the build-and-rush mechanic still employed by so many modern-day RTS games -



rear if you want them alive.

Duels Mano e mano



As well as army battles, Mark Of Chaos also possesses an encounter called a Duel, in which two Heroes face off against each other in one-on-one combat. Once you initiate a duel, your Hero and his opponent are enveloped in a fiery circle which no other unit can encroach on, leaving the combatants to duke it out till one of them drops - or runs away.

There are a number of tactics you can employ during these slugfests, including defensive (lessens the damage your Hero takes, but also the amount they dish out); or offensive (attacks are deadlier but you leave your Hero more exposed). Every Hero also has a collection of Duel-specific abilities and spells you can upgrade throughout the campaign, turning them into the ultimate warrior of the fiery circle. Now there's a TV programme just waiting to be commissioned.

Weekly shop With your armies transferable from one battle to the next and with regiments gaining in experience as the campaign goes on, it's paramount to keep your troops well maintained, something that you can do at any town on the strategic map...



Replenish your diminished regiments at the Temple or resurrect fallen Heroes so that they might live to fight another day.



The barracks is the place to recruit new men to help swell your ranks with a wide range of melee, mounted and missile troops.



You can equip your troops with deadlier weapons and tougher armour at the armoury, or buy siege ladders and morale-boosting upgrades.



Running low on magic potions? Then stop by the Alchemist, a shop where you can buy an array of healing and power-boosting concoctions.

instead opting for a more mature, rolling resource model, which sees you retaining your armies from one battle to the next you can never just send your troops into a mass brawl and hope for the best.

Utilising height advantage, line of sight, flanking manoeuvres and combined arms are skills you'll need to call upon if you're to walk away grasping victory in your bloodcaked fist.

You'll develop genuine attachments to your regiments as they survive to fight another day alongside you. You'll also beam proudly as they gain experience and skill, bask in the glow of smug self-satisfaction when they emerge victorious from a battle with minimum casualties, and shed a tear as you pack them off to college with only your old black-and-white TV set for company and a pocket full of £20s to spend on piss-weak booze. Actually, ignore that last one. Maybe in the expansion pack, eh?

WATCH YOUR HEAD

Preserving your troops doesn't only involve preventing the enemy from cleaving them up, as your men can also take damage from your own weapons. Pounding massed enemy ranks with roaring cannons may be a devastating tactic, but neglect to cancel their attack orders in time and they'll do just as much damage to your forces as they engage the enemy.

There's also an excellent morale system - which sees decimated regiments turn and run for their lives - that further swells the game's tactical core and several top-notch missions that allow you to work in unison





with an AI ally. All of which means it doesn't take a level-99 mage with +100 Wisdom and an amulet of Perspicacity to work out that Mark Of Chaos is an RTS brimming with tactical substance and brutal, unforgiving realism.

CRUMBLING

So what about the game's siege battles? Well, I'm glad you asked, as they're a bit.. Well... Shit, actually. Which is a damn shame considering how much fun their battlefield counterparts are. Damn shame.

It's hard to shake off the nagging sense that Mark Of Chaos's siege levels are embarrassingly clumsy, like a fatigued father falling off the stage at his son's parent/student talent contest. For starters, the game's somewhat clunky and unintuitive camera interface is compounded by its inability to gauge height and distance during siege warfare, regularly leaving you staring at a fortress's walls as your painstakingly preserved, upgraded and loved army is massacred somewhere out of sight.

As a result, attacking castles is tedious. Yes, that's the word, tedious - utterly bereft of the visceral brutality you'd associate with this kind of onslaught. These castle battles often end up degenerating into mechanical chores, tolerated only in the hope that the next level will be better, or as a means to an end to reach the next segment of the compelling plot.

Defending fortresses is slightly more entertaining (only slightly, mind), but even these battles lack the desperation and



excitement you'd expect from holding back the tide of a superior force, with the poor camera controls further sapping these situations of any genuine sphinctershrivelling moments.

While we're on the subject of let-downs, I'd better mention the smattering of Hero missions, which are even flatter than the siege missions. Placing you in command of a handful of heroes, these novelty levels are bereft of any tangible tactical substance, often degenerating into mindless click-fests as you unleash your Heroes' spells on hordes of cannon fodder enemies and a couple of tricky bosses, while waiting impatiently for them to regenerate enough power to cast them again. Frankly, it's a bit of a waste of time.

MARK OF QUALITY

So as you can see, Mark Of Chaos isn't without its problems. So why should you buy it? Well, for starters, it faithfully and competently milks the Warhammer licence like an ambidextrous farmhand, providing an entertaining and twisting tale of conquest and redemption.

What's more, despite its shortfalls, it's actually a damn fine RTS and while not











STAR WARS: **EMPIRE AT WAR -FORCES OF CORRUPTION**

EXPANSION PACKS ARE funny old

things. First they get you all keyed

up and clammy with their hype

machines, inspiring you to dream of long,

yourself with richly embellished versions

Then, more often than not, they slap you

round the chops with a set of unimaginative,

tacked-on features, identikit, soulless levels

and a couple of new units/weapons (delete

as appropriate). If you're an Empire At War

fan gazing hopefully at these pages, it's my

Set in the aftermath of A New Hope, this

misfortune to inform you that Forces Of

Corruption falls into the latter category.

new add-on plants you in the shoes of a

leader who's decided it's about time the

universe sat up and took notice of his

WHAT LIES BENEATH

criminal consortium.

chap called Tyber Zann, a mop-haired pirate

wonderful nights spent reacquainting

of your favourite games.







Martin Korda gets to grips with yet another ridiculously long-titled expansion pack

DEVELOPER Petroglyph **PUBLISHER** Activision WEBSITE www.petroglyphgames.com

ETA Out now **PRICE** £19.99





AT A GLANCE...

In a disappointing expansion to the original RTS, you command a criminal faction against both the Empire and the Alliance, using new abilities to corrupt or overpower enemy planets.

System requirements



HOW IT STACKS

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR 35%

SW: EMPIRE AT WAR - 59%

On its well-varnished surface, Forces Of Corruption appears to be a bold attempt to infuse Empire At War with a radical new gaming mechanic, one that offsets the combat-heavy approach of the original and

provides you with a collection of underhand tactics with which to corrupt planets

without resorting to too much force (though all-out attacks are still very much an option).

Piracy, for example, generates income from every ship passing through a system and gives you access to certain enemy ship types. Bribery prevents planets from producing any new units. Setting up a black market allows you to keep abreast of the tech race between the Empire and the Alliance. There are other similar options too, only it really isn't worth wasting any more ink explaining them, as most involve little more than dragging the new Defiler unit onto a planet, then clicking a box to select an action and waiting a few seconds for your order to be executed.

Granted, some of these strategies do require a frontal assault, but while the space battles are as frenzied as ever, the dull ground skirmishes of the original are often further watered down by requiring you to eliminate just one specific unit to gain victory. What's more, the problems that blighted Empire At War's cinematic view remain, so it's still a toss-up as to whether you'll be ogling laser jousts or left staring at a tree/ asteroid as the battle rages off screen.

Throw in a few minor bugs and some timid AI that rarely seems to attack your planets - effectively stripping the new

The dull ground skirmishes of the original are often further watered down



The plot thickens New and old storylines merge into one epic adventure



Forces Of Corruption's plot is easily the game's strongest feature. It sees you double-crossing Jabba the Hutt - to gain possession of an ancient artefact - and outwitting the Empire as you search for mounds of money and something even more valuable to your cause. Expertly interweaving new developments into the plots of The Empire Strikes Back and Return Of The Jedi, this is one storyline no hardcore Star Wars fan will want to miss.





campaign of any real tension - and it's not long before you start to feel that familiar, chilling grip of disappointment squeezing your spinal column.

SOME HOPE

Fortunately, however, Forces Of Corruption isn't a total loss. For starters, the plot is superb and almost single-handedly makes it worth buying (see 'The Plot Thickens', above). Plus, some faultless voice-acting, an imaginative collection of new units and weapons, and the appearance of many of our favourite Star Wars characters including Mr Han Solo and his walking rug further raise the bar.

Ultimately, though, this expansion pack offers much of the same as before, with a few well-disguised drag-and-drop options thrown in for good measure. Unless you can't get enough of the original game or you're a Star Wars fanatic who's been hankering for some new plot developments, then it simply isn't worth corrupting your hard disk with what has sadly turned out to be another promising but ultimately inadequate add-on.



Empire At War Sound Rousing

orchestral score
Multiplayer Top-notch multiplayer campaign

- Cleverly weaved plot
- Space battles still as fun
- as they ever were Solid selection of
- New options feel hollow
- Original's problems still abound

The Force is *meh* in this one



applicable Internet fees.

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DEVELOPER ArenaNet **PUBLISHER** NCsoft WEBSITE

www.guildwars.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE** £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Moroccan-themed expansion gives Guild Wars players an extra continent, two new classes and a hero-pet system.

System requirements



HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT \$950/0

GUILD WARS: NIGHTFALL 89%

CITY OF HEROES 377%

OSTING NOWT TO play bar the price on the box, Guild Wars has enticed many penny-pinching MMORPG players into its clutches and with Nightfall, it continues to borrow heavily from the rest of the RPG genre, both online and offline.

In fact, at times Guild Wars: Nightfall is a bit hard to call an MMORPG. It has all of the hallmarks of the genre, but at times it feels all too similar to old-man Diablo II mixed with two-parts EverQuest and three-parts of fantasy-cliché.

Playable as a standalone part of the Guild Wars world, Nightfall mimics Factions by bringing two new classes to the table. The god-bothering, scytheswinging Dervish can enchant himself with all sorts of spiritual prayers and cause ice and earth damage, and the friendly neighbourhood Paragon can tactically assist players on the battlefield with various buffs and health boosts while lobbing spears at people's heads.

The truth of the matter is that while these classes are great fun to play, you're still basically causing direct damage or buffing yourself and your group; the MMORPG class-barrel has

been scraped dry, and no matter how pretty they make it look, it's still back to basics.

Along with the new classes comes the much-anticipated hero system, which is somewhat like the henchman system, allowing lonely people to have friends who run into battle with them, except with the depth of customisation you have with your own character. Like an angry Barbie, you can dress up these dolls of death with the same items you use, control their skill development and generally level them up as you would your own character.

MY HERO

These heroes are remarkably well done, avoiding the obvious pitfalls of making them two-dimensional monster-copies (like the hunter's pets from World Of Warcraft); in fact, there's almost no difference between dealing with your own character or them, beyond the allocation of abilities, which is done across all of your heroes depending on class.

Thus, they can be applied on almost a chess-like level; you're able to gear up, level and prepare the skills of each hero as you would yourself, and your mini-army can be prepared down to the level of what moves

they're going to be able to pull off in combat, making the normal MMORPG stable of preparing your pets a lot more interesting.

They can be added and dropped any time you're in town, and more crucially put in place of a human player in a group even if it means having an entire group of henchmen and your own hand-groomed heroes and heroines. This really complements Guild Wars, considering that a great deal of Nightfall's content takes place in your own little instance-bubble within the NCsoft servers

Nightfall takes on and tramples one of the greatest annoyances of MMORPG gameplay; no more waiting around for the right group once you've built up a good stable of heroes (which, at least in the new campaign, is surprisingly fast). While they don't necessarily replace human interaction (with a good player being able to outplay a bot by virtue of being able to think on their feet), they effectively plug any holes a group might have - your L, F and G keys will thank you.

Unlike a great deal of other MMORPGs even the mighty World Of Warcraft -Nightfall pushes a slick, cinematic storyline throughout its campaign. It follows the









Like an angry Barbie doll, you can dress up these dolls of death with the same items you use

usual fantasy problems – some evil bastard is being a nuisance by trying to release an angry god, which spells certain doom for the continent of Elona and the rest of the world, and somehow you're embroiled in it.

QUEST TO IMPRESS?

Guild Wars has always had a strong storydriven feel to it, somewhat linearly dragging players through an intricately woven tale in fact, at times it feels more like Baldur's Gate or a good Final Fantasy than an MMORPG, regardless of quests really not being much more than 'go here, kill this'.

Sadly this two-dimensional questing hasn't really been remedied by Nightfall with it instead trying to build upon the formula and make it as fun and pretty as possible. It's very easy to





REVIEWSGUILDWARS:NIGHTFALL

Village people Nightfall kicks off with a mission against a bunch of corsairs attacking Chahbek Village – it's your job to take them out...



Using your heroes and with backup from the Sunspears, you've got to fight through the corsairs.



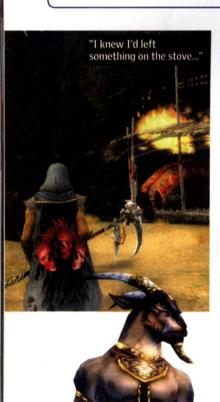
The pesky corsairs have built fortifications by your catapults, so take your team up there and arm them.



Oh, and while you're meandering there, you might just have to take on head-honcho Midshipman Bennis.



Once there, let 'em rip on the corsair ships, saving the village on your first day of work. Not bad for a newbie.





get caught up in the storyline, the atmosphere and the vast unconventional scenery that makes up the new continent. However, at the same time you'll feel like you've been there before – maybe not as a Sunspear, and maybe not in a jungle, but you've certainly killed angry mythical beasts, and you've certainly used a combination of direct-damage, buffs and heals to do so.

GUILD BORES

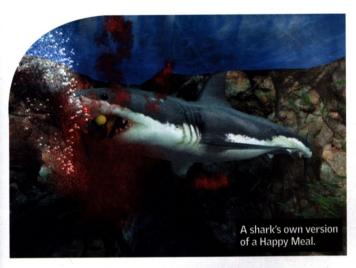
That's the greatest annoyance of Guild Wars, and consequently Nightfall. The new expansion is a great deal more polished, well-presented and downright fun than most expansions for pay-per-month games, and is genuinely a joy to play. However, no matter how hard it tries, it's doing everything that every other MMORPG does, except with a few old ideas spruced up and hammered in. For instance, the hero system is constructed out of bits and bobs pulled from RPGs from

Planescape: Torment to Pokémon, and the main core of the gameplay is the work of every other MMORPG out there. It's not so much that these are bad ideas - far from it it's more that you've probably seen them a thousand times over.

Contrary to this, Nightfall actually comes highly recommended to both newbies and the elite. While it's a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none, the spit and polish and graphical spectacle thrown at you from the very instant you start is amazing. It's fun, furious, fast, user-friendly and you can get a substantial amount of play out of it no matter what level you are - even from ten minutes of farting about. With a reasonably epic storyline, gorgeous graphics, epic vistas and plenty to do for even the most dimwitted and anti-social of gamers, Guild Wars: Nightfall is definitely worth picking up. It's a case of evolution over revolution, and it's surprisingly good.







JAWS UNLEASHED

Sleeping with the fishes

DEVELOPER

Appaloosa Interactive **PUBLISHER THQ**

WEBSITE

www.jawsthegame.com **ETA** Out now

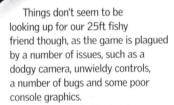
PRICE £29.99

System requirements



METHING LURKS UNDER the water. And it's not a floating turd either; no, no, that would be on the surface. Instead, it's the Spielberg-created, dead-eved, fishy-breathed monster of the '70s, the one single-handedly responsible for making me afraid of going in the swimming pool.

Developed by Appaloosa Interactive (the former developers of Sega classic Ecco The Dolphin), things follow a much darker path here than in the hippy favourite, Ecco. You play as the great white shark who's yet again returned to terrorise the inhabitants of Amity Island, thus equating to a series of stages in which you must hunt and be hunted by the residents of the island, returning back to the relative safety of the ocean between missions.



However, the brilliant John Williams theme tune is present and correct, some of the underwater scenes can look guite pretty and the first 30 minutes had me in stitches after I discovered that I could jump onto land, dismember people in different ways and that the panicked swimmers sound a bit like Futurama's Dr Zoidberg. Sadly, much of the novelty wore off soon after and the rest of the game left me, just like many in the film, dead in the water.

Suzy Wallace







LOTR: BFME II - THE RISE OF THE WITCH-KING

It'll put a spell on you

ELL HERE'S A surprise.

No, not that there's still

enough room to fit a

DEVELOPER EA LA **PUBLISHER** EA WEBSITE lotrea.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE** £19.99

System requirements (4)

review on this page after the

longest title in gaming history, but

that this expansion pack is actually

better than the original game. Then

again, perhaps it isn't such a shock,

given that this add-on is a PC-only

title, unlike the console-orientated

So what's different? Well for

starters, the tedious, overly linear

and one-dimensional trawls that

in BFME2 have been replaced by

far more challenging skirmishes,

passed themselves off as battlefields

which stretch your strategic prowess

to far greater lengths than before,

if never quite pushing you to your

limits. The plot is also worth an

honourable mention, admirably

The Battle For Middle-Earth II.



Some excellent new units, including Snow Trolls that hammer through enemy ranks like legions of charging cavalry, coupled with an array of imaginative new Heroes provide plenty of variety, while the proactive AI and numerous hotspots on many maps give missions that frenetic edge so sorely missing from the full version. However, be warned: Witch-King's epic battles are far more power hungry than its predecessor's,

card to truly enjoy them. With the War Of The Ring turnbased campaign also receiving some minor though effective tweaks, this is one add-on pack you should snap up like a slavering Warg. Amazing what's possible when consoles don't get in the way, isn't it?

and you'll need at least a 256MB 3D

Martin Korda







DEVELOPER Related Designs **PUBLISHER** Deep Silver WEBSITE www.anno1701.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE** £34.99

HERE ARE THREE questions you'll ask yourself when playing Anno 1701. They are: "Wasn't it daytime a second ago?"; "Why do my legs hurt?"; and "Where did all my friends go?" But none of these questions are really important when the fate of the colonies depends on you.

Like its predecessors, the surprisinglynamed Anno 1602 and Anno 1503, this is a city-building game with an economy spread over several islands. There are ten scenarios to try out and a heavilysimplified sandbox, as well as the four mostly excellent tutorials. However, the continuous play mode with its mass of alterable start-up conditions is where you'll spend your time. You start with a ship and some cash from good Queen Mary. Off you sail into a non-specific Caribbean clime to establish settlements.

It all seems easy at first, when you just need to keep your pioneers fed and housed. However, to advance they'll need more resources, so step forward the usual Venn diagram of overlapping spheres of influence from churches, doctors, theatres and so on. Each island only has a limited selection of resources, so you find yourself establishing smaller vassal colonies to support your central town and enable it to expand, and setting your ships complex trade routes as

they attempt to get resources to the right locations at the right times.

If any of the resources, anywhere down the chain, start to fail or don't match the demands of your growing population, then revolution fills the air. houses start getting burnt and your income plummets. Too often in these city games, that's the point at which you lose, as everything collapses around you. Here, thankfully, the game gradually stabilises back at a lower settler level. Then you work out the problem and learn from your mistake, without having to restart. Now that's a clever mechanic.

LIKE A DUCK TO WATER

Thankfully, there's less emphasis on war than in the previous two games. The naval combat's relatively simplistic, especially compared to Pirates!, but the same can be said of Medieval II: Total War. Yes, you have to defend your ships against pirates but that's as far as it goes; you're more threatened by the wonderfullooking tornadoes and earthquakes. The cannons and infantry war stuff is mostly voluntary, but even then it's betterorganised than the piss-poor efforts of Civ: City Rome or Caesar IV.

Granted, Anno 1701's not a renaissance in anything but graphics; you have to

question how much replay value there is once you've built everything, while irritating design decisions such as only letting you build or demolish one thing at a time will grate. Despite that, it ranks as one of the most challenging and addictive city-builders we've played this year.



AT A GLANCE...

Establish a colony on several Caribbean islands and gain. independence from the gueen in this decent city-builder.

System requirements



HOW IT STACKS

CIV CITY: ROME 310/0

CAESAR IV 3 74%

ANNO 1701 3730/0

The next level is here

GAME
The next level

game.co.uk

REVIEWSTHESIMS2:PETS







THE SIMS 2: PETS



Steve Hogarty's got some puppies in his van; would you like to see?



AT A GLANCE...

An expansion pack for *The Sims 2* which adds pets and an option on the phone to call a stripper. But only one of these is true, unfortunately.

System requirements

9

HOW IT STACKS

THE SIMS 2: PETS 720/0

THE SIMS 2: 72%

FAMILY FUN STUFF 19%

EMEMBER HOW IN 2002 there was an expansion pack for *The Sims* called *Unleashed*? It had pets in it – really oddly animated pets. Well, here's your chance to buy it again, this time for *The Sims 2*. Also, for no reason at all, Hilary Duff is in it! Why? Because kids like Hilary Duff! Yay!

To be fair, this is probably the expansion pack Maxis were least unwilling to make – in fact, it probably only required minimal whipping at the hands of EA to produce. This enthusiastic approach to *The Sims 2: Pets* has resulted in a decent release, and looking past the mindless inclusion of Simlish covers of Pussycat Dolls songs ("flerpdee wah wah krakawaka woo woo" being an improvement over their actual lyrics), there's actually a lot of genuinely great content to be had.

The Sims 2 engine, which no longer restricts movement to tiles, means that dogs and cats can move about with a modicum of realism instead of running only at 90-degree angles like some demented autistic creature. The ability to customise your human characters has been applied to the pets too. Dogs can be big or small and of a wide variety of breeds, and if recreating

the household pet is something you want to spend your time doing, you can tweak things such as hair colour, type, patterns, patches and even those funny moustache bits some dogs have.

DOG EAT DOG

There are a few other pets available, such as rodents and birds, but as is the case in real life, these amount to nothing more than interactive furniture. The cats and dogs count as family members, and while you can't directly control them, they have needs (such as the need to chew and scratch things). Through scolding and praising they can be taught behaviours, and through relentless training they can be taught commands - both of which are skills they can use to further themselves in their chosen careers. These aren't like people careers (and not, as Log seemed to think, "driving tractors and stuff"), but animal careers, such as being a guide dog or a movie star.

Sims fans would love this regardless of quality – what's really impressive is that Maxis have gone beyond our expectations of a Sims 2 expansion, to please players more than just enough to pry open their wallets. The detail lavished upon the original Sims 2







Dogs piss in the kitchen, cats drink the mess, puppies struggle with stairs

Happy days

So how did our doppelgängers fare?



To fully discover just how customisable the animals are, we created the Zoners family a madcap bunch of happy-go-lucky writers who've found themselves living together in suburbia with their beloved pets. Suzy's cat Kooks, my dog Jessie, Will's dog Bell and Log's dog George pissed everywhere, destroyed all the furniture and stayed up all night barking. In that respect, the virtual pets were surprisingly accurate replicas.

has filtered down to every aspect of this add-on; dogs piss in the kitchen, cats drink the mess, puppies struggle with stairs, cats destroy sofas, dogs beg at the dinner table the needless detail will surprise you.

HEAVY PETTING

And if selling puppies down the pub is your kind of thing, you'll be well catered for here too. Breeding cats and dogs is as simple as

patting them on the head in such a way as to not only suggest to them that you want them to make babies, but also which cat or dog you want them to do it with. After a romp in a kennel, the little ones emerge with the combined traits of their parents - often creating new breeds, something not scientifically accurate, but fun nonetheless. And yes, you can sell them. But no, you can't make cat-dogs.

So while it's a Sims 2 expansion, and while it's about pets, it's a wellmade, superbly polished addition to the original game. And there aren't many EA expansión packs we'd dare say that about.









THE SIMS 2: **GLAMOUR** LIFE STUFF



Live a life of glamour, and stuff

DEVELOPER Maxis PUBLISHER EA

WEBSITE www.thesims2.co.uk

ETA Out now PRICE £9.99

System requirements 🔁

HERE'S NOTHING MORE glamorous than finding out you've been invited to a prestigious industry event and having to run to Tesco the morning before to purchase a £25 suit made out of what feels like mulched paper and rat hair, and then having all the buttons fall off by the end of the night.

That's probably why I was chosen to review The Sims 2: Glamour Life Stuff. Well, that and because I reviewed the other Stuff pack too. The Sims 2: Family Fun Stuff scored a reprehensible 19 per cent, and this one, which also features 60 new items you didn't even know you wanted, is going to score 18 per cent. Sorry for ruining the suspense before you got to the bottom of the page.

The glamorous objects in this content pack include things such as fur



coats, a spoof of that Marilyn Monroe painting Andy Warhol did, some tables and things and a stereo.

There's no need to cough up ten pounds to have these items. They're not even that glamorous, especially some of the tables. Sure, they're more glamorous than your average table, but glamorous enough to be in a Glamour Life content pack? Please, EA, you're fooling nobody but yourselves with these semiglamorous tables. From now on, every Stuff pack you release will be scored one per cent lower than the previous Stuff pack, until you stop making them. This isn't even funny any more.

Steve Hogarty







BARROW HILL: CURSE OF THE ANCIENT CIRCLE

Nothing to do with Silent Hill

DEVELOPER Shadow Tor **PUBLISHER** Lighthouse Interactive WEBSITE www.barrow-hill.co.uk FTA Out now **PRICE £14.99**

System requirements 2



ECHNOLOGY HAVING CONDEMNED it to the gaming dustbin, there aren't many point-and-click adventures these days. This hasn't deterred indie developer Shadow Tor though, who have come up with Barrow Hill, a sort of West Country-version of Call Of Cthulhu mixed with bits of Broken Sword.

The game kicks off on the autumn equinox, when after a short car ride, you're left in the eerily quiet Barrow Hill, where the excavation of a mysterious stone monument has resulted in the strange disappearance of the archaeologists involved.

An old-style adventure interface powers things along, with mouse commands used to move around and examine the rendered landscape.



Barrow Hill makes the adventure experience as trouble-free as possible: if an inventory item is ever required you're alerted, and there's hardly ever a moment when you're unsure as to what you should be doing.

Puzzles present a challenge without being overwhelming, and there's also 'archaeological elements' to spice things up a bit, which most of the time means you using a metaldetector to hunt out various items.

However, Barrow Hill adds nothing new to the genre and the game world itself isn't very large. Factor in the heavy levels of backtracking, and exploration quickly becomes tedious and boring. Still, there are some nice touches and if you can overlook its rather by-thenumbers approach, then Barrow Hill might well be worth exploring.

Andy Robinson







EARACHE EXTREME METAL RACING

Turn it down, dear

DEVELOPER Data Design Interactive **PUBLISHER** Metro 3D WEBSITE www.earacheextre memetalracing.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE** £14.99

System requirements 2



70U KNOW WHEN you go to the toilet in your significant other's parents' house, only to discover that there's no toilet paper? Earache Extreme Metal Racing is far, far worse.

Essentially, it's what you'd end up with if you took Mario Kart, branded it up with various heavy-metal bands and then stripped away everything remotely fun or entertaining.

There's eight racers on offer, neither particularly unique from the other and five tracks, three of which need to be unlocked - and that's it.

Unlockables are opened by knocking down zombies scattered around the race track - which is pretty much the whole point of the game considering there's hardly any incentive to finish the race, and we usually found ourselves

slumbering in boredom after the first lap. In short, not bovvered.

Ouch, my ear.

The absurdly small selection of hard content aside, the game itself isn't much more impressive. Racers handle like three-wheeled shopping trolleys, either slugging around corners or crashing out of the scenery with a touch of a button, and tracks are generic and never offer anything particularly exciting. What's more, some menus even ask for PS2 memory cards.

Still, it's not completely broken; there's a functioning - but incredibly boring - racing game in there, and the soundtrack, like, rawks.

But at least you don't have to explain to anyone why you're walking with an uncomfortable, coffeecoloured limp, eh?

Andy Robinson





FEEL THE INTENSE POWER OF

THE NEXT GENERATION IS OVER A HUNDRED HIGH-DEF GAMES

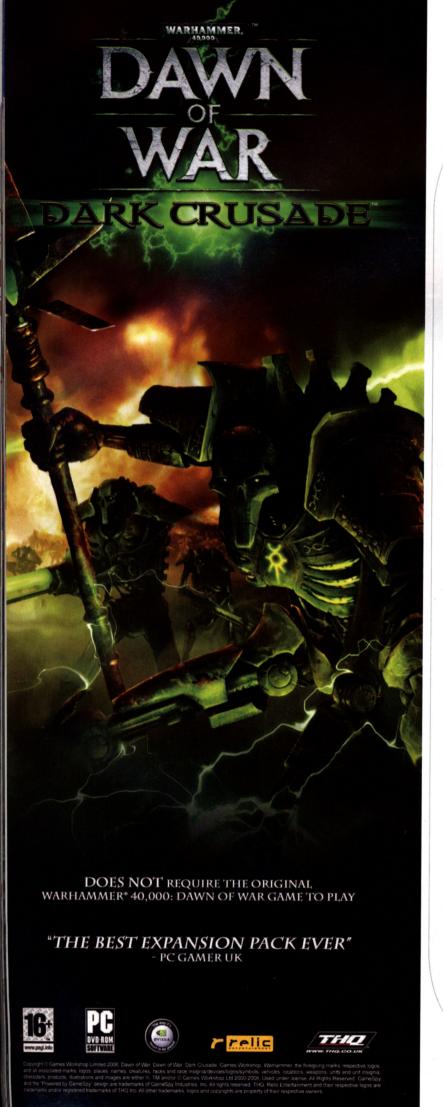
AND COUNTING. Whether you want to shoot or strategise, race or roleplay, play sports or play with your kids, Xbox 360^{TM} has the game to answer your every whim, rush, and glory-soaked desire. xbox.com

HAVING WAY TOO MANY OPTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM.



Jump in.







SECRET FILES: TUNGUSKA

Point, click, repeat

DEVELOPER Animation Arts PUBLISHER Deep Silver WEBSITE www.secretfiles-game.com **ETA** Out now PRICE £19.99

System requirements 1



EFORE DOING THIS review, I thought I'd read up about Tunguska. Arguably overkill for a half-page review, but I wanted to look clever. Now I'm more confused than before I started, so I'm going to talk about the game instead.

Secret Files: Tunguska is simple everything's in the mouse. The two available actions - examine and use sit on either mouse button, your inventory is constantly visible and you only have to tap the spacebar to highlight all the environmental clickables. It may reduce the frustration of not seeing the glint of a tiny key, but it does also highlight the terrible finity of options. It's easy to slip into the 'idly click on everything and feel appalled when the sunglasses and the vellow shard actually combine to form a green glimmer, whatever the hell a green glimmer is' approach to adventuring.

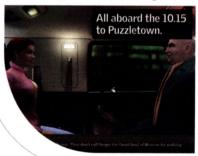


For a childlike game from the mid-'90s CD-ROM revolution, Tunguska does a truly confusing job of trying to be adult. It's like watching an episode of *Torchwood* – no matter how much people say "shit" and "piss", you're still playing a girl who's looking for her daddy, and uses the word 'daddy' while she does it.

A favourite moment is when you see a photo of a fairly normal-looking man. You say, and I'm definitely paraphrasing here: "There's no way he's not gay," before philosophically concluding, "Oh well, everyone has their faults". Go begrudging tolerance!

Tunguska is an adequate and traditional (read 'hugely dated') pointand-click, and there's some charm to the puzzles and story. If you found Sam & Max too whimsical, cartoonish. and... Um... Fun, this is for you.

Jon Blyth







BLITZKRIEG 2: FALL OF THE REICH

Is this a war to end all wars?

DEVELOPER Nival Interactive **PUBLISHER** Ascaron WEBSITE www.cdv-blitzkrieg.com **ETA** Out now PRICE £19.99

System requirements 🚱

in 1999.

IKE ITS PREDECESSOR and countless other add-ons, Fall Of The Reich is another game that features the words 'historical' and 'authentic' on the back of the box. It's also a game that, on first play-through, seems to have barely evolved since Sudden Strike arrived on the radar back

Set during the final months of WWII on the Eastern Front, the game gives you a stack of units to nudge around and it's up to you to make best use of them. That there are so many units to play with if you choose to play as the Germans is surprising too – they seem far better equipped and motivated in this game than the history books would suggest.

Dour authenticity aside, Fall Of The Reich is a very competent strategy



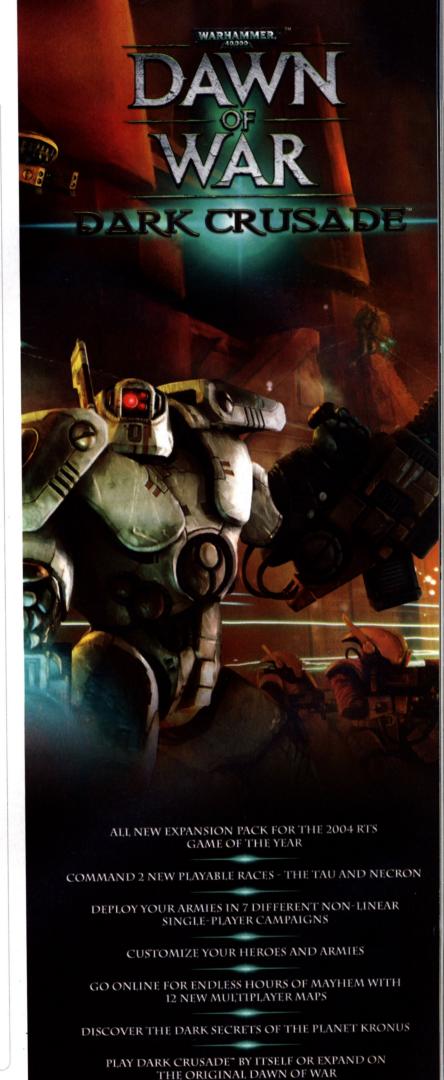
game, where unit placement and timing are absolutely crucial. Panzer IV's and T-34s roll about in a convincing way and the units all do what they're told without any display of inanity.

The problem is that this 'standalone expansion' does absolutely nothing that hasn't been done before. Different circumstances perhaps, but you have the same units doing the same things on the same terrain with the same strategy required as in other Blitzkrieg games.

Given that you can pick up the original Blitzkrieg 2 for a fiver, and that Company Of Heroes has wowed all in its path, this is a series that increasingly looks stuck in the past. Richie Shoemaker

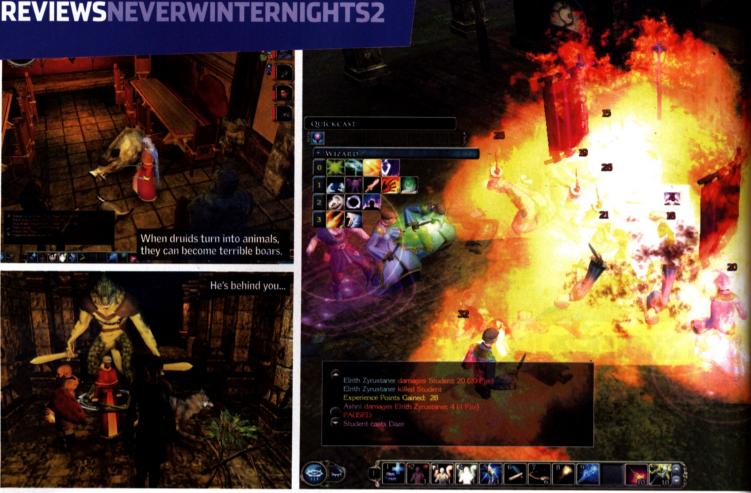












NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2

Dan Griliopoulos asked for a mission and got one. Never say Neverwinter again...

DEVELOPER Obsidian **PUBLISHER** Atari WFRSITF www.atari.com/nwn2/ **ETA** Out now **PRICE £34.99**



AT A GLANCE...

Obsidian continue to tread in the footsteps of giants with one of the biggest sequels in RPGs yet.

HOW IT STACKS

themselves. There's a particular sub-race of stalker, separate from the mythical Ukrainian type, who follows his or her victim, copying everything they do. Obsidian, one-time Black Isle Studios, have followed in BioWare's footsteps. making Icewind Dale to BioWare's Baldur's Gate, making the sequel to BioWare's Knights Of The Old Republic, and now making Neverwinter Nights 2. It's all a bit creepy. If I were BioWare,

I'd have a restraining order out and a

large rottweiler in the yard.

IOWARE MUST BE crapping

Attitudes to the original, long-delayed king of RPGs varied; it was welcomed for its toolset and its accurate 3D recreation of the Dungeons & Dragons world, but the single-campaign was somewhat turgid, if unpredictably twisty and satisfyingly long. Obsidian have recreated Neverwinter Nights almost exactly for the seguel, adding in everything that was in any of the expansion packs, but not really expanding on the previous game in any way. Apart from the graphics, we really do have trouble believing it's a different game at all.

So the first unoriginal element rears its head. Our hero has been raised on a remote farm, surprise! It's near enough the city of Neverwinter to get yobs coming out and tipping cows, but far enough away that the local swamp is teeming with lizardmen. undead and those really irritating Scottish gnats. And one night, in fact the very night you've done the tutorial at the local fair, they come to visit. Even the gnats.

PAVED WITH GOLD

So following a stalwart defence of your village, you're packed off to find your fortune in the big city of Neverwinter, with a mysterious magic shard that necromancers, demons and transplanar races seem really keen to get their hands on. Lucky you.

By this point you'll have created your character and chosen your race. The traditional D&D creeds are all in there, with the addition of substantially different sub-races and the powerful new Tiefling and Aasimar races (half-devil and half-angel respectively.) You'll also have chosen your class, which Obsidian have also expanded incrementally from the last NWN expansion; on top of the usual monk, fighter, ranger and so on, there's a whole host of new prestige classes, ranging from berserker to shadow thief.

As always, the really interesting plot isn't why your avatar is chasing down the macguffin, but why your team members have chosen to come along with you, beyond simple bloodlust.

Like Knights Of The Old Republic II, you recruit henchmen as you travel the world. You can have up to three henchmen (other henchmen wait at your uncle's pub) and, while they're not quite as bizarrely inspired as Planescape Torment's garrulous skull, pyromaniac corpse and hollow suit of armour, or Baldur's Gate's berserker Minsc and his pet hamster, or even NWN1's kobold bard Deekin, they're perfectly good sidekicks whose stories are worth eliciting.

You find out more about your motley crew by performing tasks which they approve of, at which point you can go deeper into their backstories and hopefully unlock more of their skills. However. balancing off individual members' desires can be difficult, especially as it's hard to predict how they react to a given action.

GO ON, SCRATCH IT

The amazing thing about Neverwinter Nights is the amount of information just below the surface and the varied ways of









You can kill some enemies easily, but some butcher you like back bacon

Boom! Ahem, I

meant BOOM!

getting to it. After an age playing the game and a bit of exploration in the menu system, we discovered that a long right-click could create a previously unearthed menu that provided 120 different quick-action buttons for each character. And it's not all about the customisable depth of the game either in terms of prettification, the highly mobile camera gives you the option of playing from just about any angle.

CARRY ON COMMANDER

And that's just looking at the game. When you're commanding your henchmen in combat, you can pause everything, queue up orders and move commands. Then you can watch the victorious outcome, or more likely, your ignominious defeat. Thankfully, unlike Oblivion, the enemies aren't levelled to your character, meaning sometimes you kill them with ease and sometimes they butcher you like back bacon. At which point you load, then pull out the hundreds of scrolls, potions, wands and various magic items you've been lugging around and blow them to kingdomcome. Or you could try and talk them out of it. Or sneak around them...

We'd better say this quickly in case Peter Molyneux hears and claims he copyrighted

I made this

A whole toolset for keeping your dungeon spick and span...



You'll need a manual and a lot of patience. That's the conclusion we came to after an initial foray into the toolset, Neverwinter Nights' proprietary campaign and module creation tool, which allows you to make your own dungeons and play with your friends in them. It's been made a lot more flexible and accessible than the original's toolset, with accommodating pane layouts, separate sections for scripting and dialogue, and paintable textures and landscapes. You can also drag-and-drop creatures, items and buildings, and scale all their sizes and stats. The only major problem is that nothing is explained to you when you start the editor up, so you'll need to pick up a proper Dummies guide – a short guide in PCZ isn't going to cut it. That said, making your own quest for The Golden Udder of Log's Cabin makes you feel much more like a god than Black & White 2 ever did, so please, don't hold back.



REVIEWSNEVERWINTERNIGHTS2

Team ZONE What does your chosen hero say about you? We've made four of the PC ZONE team with extreme precision in the character creator...



Logawiz is a wizard with words, because he creates moving pictures on that magic box of his. He trips over his robes a lot, yes.



Hogarty-San used to do aikido so he gets to wear pyjamas as a Red Dragon Disciple. Despite appearances, dragon's blood runs in his veins.



Suzy is an Aasimar, a half-angel. And in the game... Her archery skills allow her to pick off men from a distance. And in the game..



Seftonian, the half-orc bard, pumps out some exciting drum 'n' bass on his enchanted decks - he's the leader of the party.





Obsidian have made a nearperfect sequel... What are we talking about? They've remade NWN almost exactly





the idea of morality when he brought the ten command lines down from Mount Bullfrog: you can be good or evil. As with all D&D games, however, you can also be neutral, choosing not to choose, and your actions are also judged on a different spectrum, the chaotic-lawful axis. As certain classes (notably the superpowered paladins, and many of the later prestige classes) lose their abilities if you aren't the right alignment and as your henchmen will open up to you if they approve of your actions - you have to be careful to walk the right line.

Let's talk problems. Beyond the unoriginality, the game makes Neverwinter feel a lot smaller than its predecessor - most doors are locked and the Baldur's Gate roaming world is sadly missing. Yes, you can visit anywhere in the world every time you leave an area. However, there aren't any areas that aren't there for a purpose, and there's no feeling of the passage of time as you trek across the world.

I have to admit to preferring the open world of Oblivion to this far more constrained experience. Moreover, there are quite a few glitches - most of the irritating variety rather than those of show-stoppage, but they are there nevertheless. You will without doubt be expected to download a patch or two upon purchase.

AN END TO WORRIES

Despite these qualms, Obsidian, reeling from their dreadfully unfinished Knights Of The Old Republic II, have made a nearperfect seguel... What are we talking about? They've remade Neverwinter Nights almost exactly, integrating all the bits that were in expansion packs, producing a witty and clever, if unoriginal plot and prettifying it somewhat. We recommend, if the multiplayer is working at launch, that you play it through first time with friends. Make sure they're not creepy, copycat friends like Obsidian though. Brrr...



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CNIGHTS NINE



















REVIEWS MAGE KNIGHT:









MAGE KNIGHT: APOCALYPSE

"Generic fantasy action? Armageddon out of here," says Dan Griliopoulos

DEVELOPER IS Games **PUBLISHER** Namco Bandai WEBSITE

www.namcobandaigames.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE** £24.99

the ultimate game! Nothing too original, but something that involves dwarves. Maybe some elves and orcs too. And let's not have any character choice - rather, let's have the normal RPG types with a really limited career progression. And let's make the plot involve an ultimate evil that's also a dragon. And let's base it on a series of lead figures that *nobody* has heard of. Woo, success! Go us!

OME ON ZONITES, let's make

Ultima Online turned the RPG into the MMORPG with only a few modifications but, over the years, the genre's adapted perfectly to its environment. Mage Knight: Apocalypse takes that online-appropriate experience, plagiarising WOW and Guild Wars, and turns it back into an offline RPG with online elements.

You pick from five characters (vampire, dragon, human, elf and dwarf), each with three different sets of magic spells that open as you use them. You can bind two spells to your left and right mouse buttons, with more available on the F keys for easy access. Your health and mana meters are

practically hidden above these, making it hard to notice when you're about to die.

Combat consists of you flipping rapidly between spells and nobbling the initially too-easy enemies; we were never really challenged by any of them. If you do die, you resurrect a few feet back. You do have henchmen, but they spend all their time stuck behind scenery. You can also play co-op, but the servers don't tend to work.

LOADSAMONEY

Then there's the problems caused by limited inventory space and the lack of auto-stacking - we spent as much time rearranging our inventory as we did ploughing through (the admittedly varied) enemies. Then you take your items back to town, sell them to NPCs and move on. There's a limited crafting system, allowing you to improve magic weapons and armour, as well as create potions, but it's futile as you get pots of money quickly.

Once you get past the clichéd plot, jerky battles and irritating interface, the game's not awful. But then, once you got past the genocide, warmongering and tiny

moustache, Hitler wasn't all that terrible either. MKA's unresponsiveness and emptiness gives it the air of an MMO that was canned and crammed into a singleplayer format, or was designed for the soloing MMO player.



- Attractive when not moving
- Stop-motion combat
- An offline MMO
- Aneurysm-inducing inventory
- Clichéd



AT A GLANCE...

Take control of one of five characters in a cut-down online/ offline role-playing game.

System requirements



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2 386%

SPELLFORCE 2 76%



HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V: HAMMERS OF FATE

Screwed up or on the nail?

DEVELOPER Nival **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft WEBSITE www.mightandmagic.com **ETA** Out now

F HOMMV IS the reinvented

prog-rock beast of the fantasy

genre, then Hammers Of Fate

can be likened to an instrument

upgrade. What's more, one with

overhead cymbals, kick drums and

double-necked guitars that, despite

being superfluous and bordering on

the ridiculous, actually fit the theme

so well you kind of wish they'd been

PRICE £19.99

System requirements 🚯



map generator and in-game entities called caravans, which basically enable you to transfer military units between towns. Not a massive

feature in the grand scheme of things, but very useful once you start to control multiple settlements.

Considering the original game only came out a couple of months back, obviously when it comes to the fundamentals, the developers haven't had an awful lot of time to make many changes. Indeed, in many ways, it feels as if you're starting from scratch with a campaign that literally sends you back to base camp. In my case, having just reached HOMMV's end-game, I'd rather have waited a bit longer and received a bit more. Led Zep this isn't, but then thankfully, it's not Marillion either.

Richie Shoemaker

there from the beginning. For instance, generic dwarf-type folks are now part of the festivities, adding an overall look that's not too far removed from World Of Warcraft, with beards, booming voices and a stunted love for mountainous and snowy terrain. In short, it's as exaggerated and as clichéd as ever.

As well as the obligatory new units and whatnot, the most obvious additions to the game are a random







MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

Putting the Alliance & Leicester to shame

DEVELOPER Beenox Studios **PUBLISHER** Activision WEBSITE www.marvelultimatealliance.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE** £29.99

System requirements 🚱

N ACTION RPG with a hefty emphasis on the action, Marvel: Ultimate Alliance sees the despicable Doctor Doom (to alliterate even more gratuitously) gathering together the forces of evil in a bid for world domination... Just to make a change.

Luckily, two dozen or so heroes, including Spider-Man, Wolverine, Thor and Elektra just happen to have a window in their diaries, and with nothing better to do, decide to band together to thwart the Doc's dastardly plans. What follows is a frenetic action-romp, with lashings of unadulterated violence and some threadbare RPG elements thrown in for good measure.

Controlling four heroes at any one time, you're required to do little more than mash buttons and use your heroes' special abilities to bulldoze through seemingly endless droves

Hit him! Hit him!

of enemies and solve a few puzzles during the interludes.

Now, this should be the part where I degenerate into a rant about how consoley the whole thing feels, moan about how patronised you'll be by the simplistic upgrade system and lament at how repetitive the whole affair is. However, if truth be told, Marvel: Ultimate Alliance is an utter hoot.

Each hero is sufficiently unique to guarantee lashings of destructive diversity, while the sheer assortment of the locations teeters on excellent. Boss battles are explosive, brutal encounters, while some perfectly cast actors bring each character to life with genuine aplomb. If you leave your brain at the door, you just might find hours of mindless fun here.

Martin Korda

















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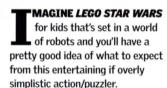


BIONICLE HEROES

Two onicles? What are they on about?

DEVELOPER TT Games PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE www.bionicleheroes.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE £19.99**

System requirements 2



After attempting to decipher the nonsensical intro, you're thrown straight into the linear, colourful, LEGO-robot infested gaming world, which teems with simple puzzles and enemies that charge at you in straight lines. As challenges go, it's right up there with opening a door or boiling

In its defence, Bionicle Heroes is clearly being aimed at the kiddy market (or at least I hope it is). presenting a pleasant alternative to the more challenging LEGO Star Wars series. What's more, seeing as the developer behind that very game is also responsible for this, you probably won't be surprised to hear



that Bionicle Heroes brims with quality, ranging from its bold, imaginative levels to the diversity of the robots that you get to control. It's just a shame that the blocky menu system and overly generous built-in aim-assist smack of console pandering, because otherwise, this is a very competent piece of programming.

If you have an eight-year-old who keeps casting envious glances at you while you're playing LEGO Star Wars, but shits his pants when LEGO Darth waddles onto the screen, then you should seriously consider buying them this as an alternative. If nothing else, it'll keep them quiet while you wield

Martin Korda







PDC WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP DARTS

Step up to the oche...

DEVELOPER Oxygen Interactive PUBLISHER Oxygen Interactive WEBSITE www.oxygenint.com

ETA Out now **PRICE £24.99**

System requirements 1



H, DARTS, THAT most noble of sports, the princely pastime for fat, beer-swilling wannabe gangsters and pissed-up pub-goers still one pint short of engaging that beautiful woman at the bar in a meaningful conversation about her frequentation of the establishment.

Now don't get me wrong, I like a game of arrows as much as the next man (so long as the next man isn't Phil Taylor or Raymond van Barneveld, both of whom appear in this fully PDC-licenced title). However, the idea of playing it on my PC is, well, just wrong.

Instead of having to listen to the twat at the bar who dishes out useless advice before you take every shot, you're forced to listen to Sid Waddell's excruciating banalities as you move your mouse backwards and forwards to take a shot. Annoying

and simplistic, now that's what

I call a killer combination.

Sure, there are a myriad of options, including a career mode and a raft of wacky party games, including Killer and Round The Clock, and the visuals are fairly impressive. Ultimately though, there's about as much depth here as a baking tin.

Some fairly slick presentation and decent AI improve matters somewhat, but overall, PDC feels more like a mini-game than a piece of software worthy of 25 quid. Go down the boozer and play for free instead. You never know, you might even pull.

Martin Korda





REVIEWSRACE













Suzy Wallace is revving the engine at the traffic lights and waiting for any takers

DEVELOPER Simbin **PUBLISHER** Eidos WEBSITE www.race-game.org **ETA** Out now

PRICE £29.99

T'S NOT SOMETHING we make a habit of, but if we had to liken driving games to characters from one of Aesop's fables, then Simbin's previous title GTR2 would be the hare, while newcomer RACE would be the tortoise. While GTR2 was all about being faster, a little more out of control and a bit sexier (OK, so we may be pushing the hare analogy here), RACE is a slower and more sedate affair. It's all about keeping up momentum, and you're far more likely to make it to the finish line. With lesser-powered cars than those of its spiritual big brother, RACE is a great place for any newcomers to start off at the simulation end of the market.

The driving itself is pretty solid, though owners of Simbin's previous titles may find it a bit weird to go from their firebreathing 600bhp exotic supercars to the equivalent of a slightly souped-up family saloon. The mainly front-wheel-drive cars put much more of an emphasis on racing lines and smooth driving, and the enjoyable pack-racing features heavily. However, the racing itself is fairly easy, and dare we say it, even a little tedious.

Visually, RACE doesn't have the same lushness as GTR 2. Although the tracks and cars are modelled well, the textures don't appear to be hi-res and everything can feel a little flat. If they'd had a bit more time with some wax and a chamois, Simbin could have made RACE look great, but instead it just seems a bit unpolished.

IN REVERSE

The engine noises sound flat and samey, although much of this is down to the fact that you're literally driving half the car that you were in GTR2. In fact, we'd say that much of RACE suffers from coming after its sibling, with the lack of power and lesser graphics often combining to make it feel like much less of a product.



While there's still a decent driving model underneath, it's hard to see RACE appealing to fans who've driven Simbin's other titles, and so, this time at least, the hare comes out on top.



Graphics Well modelled, but low-res textures Sound Rather more Mondeo than Maserati Multiplayer Yep - LAN and Internet

- Decent driving model Accurately recreated tracks and cars
- Good entry point for sim-racing newcomers
- Graphics lack sparkle Not as fun to play as its predecessor



AT A GLANCE...

A WTCC-based racing simulator that provides a decent driving model but suffers from coming after its higherpowered and better-looking brother.

System requirements

HOW IT STACKS

TOCA RACE DRIVER 3 85%

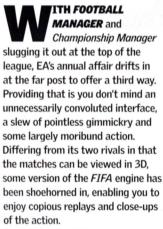


FIFA MANAGER 07

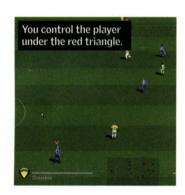
We wondered where this was...

DEVELOPER Bright Future **PUBLISHER** EA Sports WEBSITE www.easports.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE** £29.99

System requirements (3)



So far, so FIFA Manager, but this year's match engine differs wildly in that you can opt to actually take control of one of the players yourself, using keys or a pad to implement a rudimentary pass-shoot-hoof-sprint method. An odd idea, it gives you something to do while watching the



action, but is ultimately frustrating as you get so little of the ball and generally end up running your chosen player into the ground.

Elsewhere, FIFA Manager differs from FM and CM in so much as they're both developed in North London, and EA's effort is made in Germany, with all the superfluous detail that generally entails. They've really gone to town this year, delving into the personal life of the manager in bizarre fashion, including his sexuality.

We've no idea what this has to do with football, but you can buy gifts for your partner, propose to her and even breed children - and buy a house for them to live in. Clearly a different approach to traditional football management, it's just not right.







CRICKET 07

Play it yourself - just like on the telly

DEVELOPER EA Canada **PUBLISHER** EA Sports WEBSITE www.easports.com

ETA Out now **PRICE** £29.99

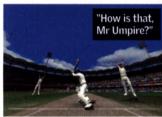
System requirements (6)



HE CLOCKS HAVE gone back, Christmas decorations pollute the shops and we're reviewing a cricket game? A cruel reminder of blue skies and short trousers, this has of course been released to cash in on The Ashes series in Australia, which may actually be taking place as you clutch this magazine to your bosom. Providing it's after midnight and you've got Sky, go and have a look.

Was it on? If so, imagine a similar scenario on your PC monitor, with the key difference that you control some of the players, and it doesn't have to go on for five days.

The game may carry the generic 'cricket' title, but to all intents and purposes this is the official game of The Ashes, in which our plucky lads travel to the land of thieves to probably - meekly surrender the symbolic urn that we earned in that





glorious summer of 2005. Those heady days can be replayed in full, along with specific scenarios - and of course you can play along with this winter's action. Or you could ignore the whole thing and play out some dreary county match.

Apart from The Ashes shenanigans, the big thing this year is the dualanalog Century Stick batting system. Providing you can achieve the holy grail of getting a dual-analog stick to work on your PC, it does make a difference, although to be honest the batting could scarcely have been any worse than last year's effort. This time, it's the bowling that's a bit flaky. Oh well, there's always next year...

Steve Hill





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REVIEWSNEEDFORSPEED:CARBON





NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON



Suzy Wallace prays she won't bump into Tim Westwood

DEVELOPER EA Black Box **PUBLISHER** EA WEBSITE nfs.ea.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE £34.99**



AT A GLANCE...

Adrenalin-packed racing with minor new wingman and canyon-racing additions complemented by a huge free-roaming city.

System requirements



HOW IT STACKS

NFS: MOST WANTED 88%

TOCA RACE DRIVER 3 850/0

S REASSURINGLY PREDICTABLE

as your gran getting a bit tipsy on too much sherry, settling down to watch The Great Escape and promptly snoring her head off over the Christmas period, EA's street racer is back again for yet another yearly outing. But in contrast to last year's Most Wanted title, where the thrust of the proceedings was clearly playing with the police, it's not so clear this time around what the main emphasis of the game is.

EA would have you believe that it's the canyon racing that's featured so prominently in the TV advertising, but that actually makes up a fairly small percentage of the title. Driving at high speed down a tight, curving road with only flimsy metal barriers to separate you from the fate of a base jumper who forgot to pack his parachute, the boss races see you in turn having to keep up with or lose your opponent. These provide some genuine edge-of-your-seat action, but they're pretty tough-going, and you'll find yourself reaching for the restart button on more than one occasion.

However, if you think they're challenging, you'll find the drift races set on the same courses are tricky beyond belief. So you

want me to get my car sideways on a narrow road flanked by certain, horrible, plummety death? Thanks a bundle...

DRIVING TO DISTRACTION

Real drivers do it sideways.

Carbon boasts another throwaway storyline to sit alongside the driving, consisting of what appears to be a collection of out-ofwork models driving a bunch of kitted-up supercars and tales featuring a police gun that apparently shoots beams of electricity. Ahem. Not that it's much of a problem the often annoying characters play a pretty minor part in the game, and thankfully you can skip the cut-scenes (which vary from amazingly produced to downright laughable) and drown out most of their speech with the sound of your engine. If only real life offered the same options.

Where the characters do infuriate, however, is in the wingman system. New for Carbon, the system enables you to build up your own crew by hiring racers with different attributes who'll race alongside you. They offer in-race benefits such as highlighting short-cuts, giving you a speedboost or blocking opponents' cars, but more often than not they tend to get in the way,

push you into oncoming traffic and generally reduce your lifespan (and that of your gamepad) thanks to raised stress levels.

Despite these shortcomings, the game still offers the customary adrenalin-packed racing that fans know and love. About as realistic as that time you drunkenly raced shopping trolleys with your mates, the racing nevertheless provides bucketloads of fun. Drifts have returned too (not all of them are set in the tricky canyons) and there's lots of variety to keep your attention, with over 100 races in the career mode and yet more in the Challenge series and online mode.

However, self-professed experts may find things a little on the easy side, with the career mode only taking us a day to crack. Still, the city is free-roaming and just driving about will see you notching up races with other crews and attracting some Most Wanted-style attention from the police, though this is a far more minor aspect of the game than in the previous title.

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY

On the visual side, things feel much more like Underground than Most Wanted, with the entire game yet again being set at night and the soft-focus graphics being ditched for











Uncommon people

Only the beautiful need apply, darling..



One thing that's been noticeable about the recent NFS titles is the amount of impossibly attractive people. Each iteration has featured increasingly gorgeous women and chisel-faced men (who all appear to pluck their eyebrows) driving a selection of supercars. Now, correct us if we're wrong, but we reckon that the average person burning rubber on the road (a) doesn't look like an unemployed supermodel and (b) doesn't quite drive something of the quality of an Aston Martin. Maybe a more realistic version would see some Burberry-clad teenagers driving their Halfords-tweaked Vauxhall Nova round a car park - we'd call it Need For Speed: Basildon. Still, there's always next year, eh, EA?

Despite its shortcomings, the game still offers the customary adrenalinpacked racing fans know and love





some old-school crisp detailing. Only this time around, things don't look quite as crisp as they did two years ago, and the lack of any major graphical improvement is a bit disappointing. The city still offers rich and varied locations though, ranging from neonlit casinos to run-down industrial areas, and with plenty of short-cuts, it provides the perfect setting for the game. The obligatory tuning section is here too, and thankfully, this time the car selection has been improved, meaning you won't have to start your racing career in a Vauxhall Corsa.

Although NFS: Carbon has its flaws, the core gameplay remains untouched, so it's still masses of fun. However, with the wingman feature and canyon racing proving only minor additions, the title isn't brimming with new stuff, instead feeling more like a mishmash of previous iterations. Fans of the series will still find it entertaining, and newcomers will have plenty to see and do, but there's simply not enough new content to recommend it over NFS: Most Wanted.



REVIEWSINDIEZONE

You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.





Football hits the headlines in this month's Indie Zone but for all the right reasons, as Martin Korda explains...



SENSATIONAL SOCCER

IF YOU DON'T fancy forking out 20 quid for Sensible Soccer 2006, then why not try this excellent Sensi clone for half the price?

Created by the same developer who brought us New Star Soccer 3 (see 'Top 5 Indie Games', opposite), Sensational Soccer differs from its predecessor by putting you in control of an entire team rather than a single player. While this new approach does rob the game of some depth and character, it's still a joy to play, with countless leagues from across the world recreated in minute detail and every player possessing a raft of stats and abilities.

Once you get to grips with the controls (gamepad, keyboard or mouse), the action transforms from a frustrating buttonmasher into a silky game of soccer, where mazy dribbles, one-touch passes. crunching tackles and stinging shots become commonplace. Throw in some fairly lifelike physics and you're left with a ball game that's almost as much fun as playing with your own.

While it lacks the novelty value of NSS3 and doesn't quite stack up to Sensi 2006, Sensational Soccer is by far the most entertaining and detailed team-based footy experience currently doing the rounds on the indie game circuit. Worth checking out.



Play as any team from Barcelona to Dumbarton.



DRACULA TWINS

DEVELOPER Legendo Entertainment WEBSITE www.legendo.com PRICE £9.99

EVERY ONCE IN a while a game comes along that sparkles with polish like a home owned by an obsessive-compulsive with a Mr Muscle fetish. Dracula Twins a platform adventure, which sees you saving your father Count Dracula from an evil captor - is just such a game.

It's obvious from the outset just how much skill and attention-to-detail has been put into this, with the 3D engine almost on a par with many full-priced retail platform adventures. The linear yet entertaining gameplay is divided up into bite-sized levels, each one packed with jumps, traps

and combat aplenty. With a beautifully composed Danny Elfman-esque musical score, crisp visuals and slick action, along with two mildly distinctive characters to play as, there's little here to seriously criticise other than a lack of challenging puzzles and the occasional control issue.

While its simplistic gameplay is probably more suited to under-tens than

hairy grown-ups (or Veet users), Dracula Twins is still one of the most polished and adept indie games we've seen in months.



FASTCRAWL

DEVELOPER Pawleyscape WEBSITE www.pawleyscape.com PRICE £19.95 (£11)

FASTCRAWL MAY LOOK about as appealing as a spanked baboon's arse, but beneath its mundane visuals lies a dungeon-crawling game that sparkles with flashes of quality and imagination.

Taking control of four hardy adventurers, you must delve into the murky depths of dungeons teeming with adversaries, traps and treasure. Unlike many other games of this ilk, FastCrawl's turn-based action moves along at a decent pace thanks to a 'Ration' system that forces you to press ahead in order to find new supplies or face starvation.

A solid game-generation system ensures that no two games are the same too, and you can even customise the

length of every adventure. Throw in a stunning array of items to collect, some decent levelling-up options plus a resounding musical score, and you're left with an RPG of commendable substance.

However, just when you think it's all going well, you're presented with a combat system that's more predictable than nasal hair, while the uniformity of the visuals soon turn your adventures into

gloopy, somewhat monotonous affairs. Potential aplenty here, but not quite a must-buy.





PROJECT XENOCLONE

DEVELOPER Oniric Games WEBSITE www.oniricgames.com PRICE \$19.99 (£11)

YOU MAY REMEMBER the rampaging all-out action classic Alien Shooter, an ugly but frenetic isometric blaster in which hordes of alien critters attempted to rip out your lungs and turn them into bagpipes.

Project Xenoclone tries to implant a strategic spine into Alien Shooter's template of madness and desperation, only it's not all that mad, rarely makes you feel desperate - other than to switch off your machine - and is as strategic as a game of chess... Without any pieces.

The game's main tactical thrust is to make you shoot your red and blue enemies with the opposite colour bullets. Problem is, this limp attempt at strategy ends up falling flat on its arse

when you suddenly realise just how uninteresting a hook it actually is.

Matters are improved somewhat by the post-mission PDA and email sections that feed you info. Plus, later levels and bosses do raise the pulse above a disinterested thump, but ultimately Project Xenoclone has to go down as

little more than a poor man's Alien Shooter. A missed opportunity if ever we've seen one.

The plot is presented

in a comic-strip style.





PCZONE TOP 5 INDIE GAMES



A deep and comp fantasy RPG that uses Diablo's all-out action formula, packed with a wealth of dungeons, countless monsters and hundreds of spells. The charming cartoon visuals infuse the game with genuine charisma, while an excellent pet system rounds off a



IEW STAR SOCCER 3

This novel take on the beautiful game melds Sensi Soccer with Football Manager and Goal (the film) to provide the most complete indie gaming footy experience currently available.



LUGARU: THE RABBIT'S FOOT

An ambitious and extremely entertaining third-person action/adventure in which you play a killer rabbit bent on revenge after his entire family is murdered. Inspired stuff.



IORNING'S WRATH

A superbly written, beautifully crafted isometric RPG that leads you on an epic adventure to save your land from destruction. A must-buy for any self-respecting RPG fan



ARMADILLO RUN

Physics-based puzzles have never been so much fun. Set up a mix of ramps, pulleys, catapults etc and navigate an armadillo to a specific end location. Simple, yet brilliant

REVIEWSBUDGET



BUDGE

Play with the undead in these not-quite-dead titles

HIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

OK, OK, SO zombies hardly play a major part in the game, and make up one of our least favourite bits of the whole game, but Garrett's third outing is simply our favourite game that somewhere, somehow features shuffling folk.

The basic concept remains to steal from the rich and, well, pocket the takings, but among the basic thieving on offer, Ion Storm also added in some excellent level design, plenty of tasty lighting effects, some pleasingly taxing AI that'll keep you on your velvetbooted toes and one of the scariest

gaming levels we've ever played in the form of The Cradle.

There are still some features that we were never too fond of, such as the doday medieval slang, seriously stupid ragdolls and small, console-friendly loading zones. However, if you've never been chased round a mansion by a guard shouting, "Come here, you taffer!", then the chance to play as our

sneaky, hooded, metaleyed friend for a mere tenner is nothing less than a steal.

Suzy Wallace















Suzy buying some nearly out-of-date iced buns

Saving: 80p



Kevin cheating Ken Livingstone by not paying for a bus once Saving: £1





DOOM 3

PUBLISHER Activision 'Best Of' range WEBSITE www.doom3.com PRICE £9.99

IF THERE'S ONE thing I hate about zombies, it's that they're always so damn thin. Why not go for fat brains, you body fascists? Luckily, the hordes of the hell dimension don't care - big dead fatties are all over the place.

Returning to Doom 3 after Prey and Quake Wars wasn't an enticing prospect but my memory had exaggerated how grim it all was. Second time around. Doom 3 is a pleasant surprise, even if you do occasionally get cross with the PDA system and scream: "I should be shooting things, not checking emails!" Roll up for a gun-toting romp, with some

very creepy whispering. Then install the pet mod and raise an army of fat zombies. Sweet.

Jon Blyth



RESIDENT EVIL 3

PUBLISHER Xplosiv WEBSITE www.xplosiv.net PRICE £9.99

YOU CAN'T HAVE a zombie round-up without mentioning the undisputed king of zombie survival horror. Sure, Resi 3 suffers from being the final reiteration of an increasingly familiar formula. OK, it's still a matter of pushing things around until you've got the Ted, Barbara, Alan and Keith keys. And the acting is what we've come to expect from zombie games, since The House Of The Dead first tested our suspension of disbelief. Still, if you've played all the others and need more, then Resi 3 is exactly what you're after. It's still a good game, for what it is.

But there's the rub - it's what it is that's the problem. More than anything else, Resident Evil 3 suffers from what came before and after it. Resident Evil 2 was the same game, but less familiar and, well, better, And no-one needs to tell you that Resident Evil 4 is about

to effectively rip the franchise apart and start all over again.

Still, all this upbeat negativity can't

detract from the game's dated solidity: I'd be remiss not to recommend it to fans of the genre. Jon Blyth







HOUSE OF THE DEAD III

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

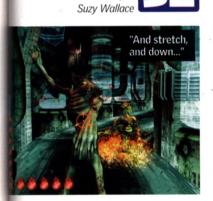
THE LATEST IN the grisly, light-gunblasting, coin-op series that sucked you dry of pound coins in the arcades, The House Of The Dead III is a zombie blaster in the truest sense of the phrase.

Presenting you with a super-violent, on-rails shooter where you quite literally do nothing except blast the crap out of everything you see, it's definitely a case of stimulation for your trigger finger rather than your grey matter.

The variation of the zombies is pretty impressive though, and you just have to giggle at the amount of gore being liberally sprayed around your screen. However, it's nowhere near as good with

a mouse as it was with a light-gun, and it's looking pretty dated now. Best left to the arcades really.









And the rest...

Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



ON BEST OF RANGE

Yes, yes, we know we're pushing this zombie theme now,

but you do unlock them in-game, and it's the only title that lets you make movies of them. Besides, Lionhead's brilliant movie-making sim is a must-have, so buy it if you haven't already.





EVIL DEAD: HAIL TO THE KING

E4.99, FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

It was rubbish when it came out and it's decayed even more with age, but it is one of the only zombie films to be made into a game. Still, it does show why they don't do it too often. If ever a game erved dismemberment, this one does



CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS

Among the mental homeless people who seem to enjoy bashing people's brains in with lead pipes, there are some enemies that can only be described as 'zombie-ish'. If you crave the visceral thrill of caving a zombie's head in, this is for you.



Better than HL2? So some say. The best non-gravity gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with xtra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG now offers the cheapest goblin-bashing around. Essential stuff.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

Glorious story-telling, engaging gameplay and the greenest lips in gaming-dom make *BG&E* a must-buy. Deep, imaginative, brilliant.



ROME: TOTAL WAR

Long-term chart-topper, *Rome: TW's* glorious real-time battles feature thousands of units hacking each other to bits. A bloody must-buy.



CAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

Great melee, sneaky stealth and oodles of lawless violence – not all console conversions are a pile of old poo.

BUYER'S GUIDE 3

The bestest games your money can buy...



TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'H'

- HALF-LIFE 2 (ISSUE148)
- HALF-LIFE (ISSUE 71)
- **HEXEN II** (ISSUE 54)
- HEXEN (ISSUE 33)
- (S) HOMEWORLD (ISSUE 82)

TOP 5 BEST GAMING THEME TUNES

- **THE BATTLEFIELD SERIES** (VARIOUS ISSUES)
- **CANNON FODDER**
- C&C: RED ALERT 1 & 2 (PCZ ISSUE 47 & 57)
- **DEUS EX** (PCZ ISSUE 93)
- FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS (PCZ ISSUE 160)

WORST EXAMPLES OF VOICE-ACTING

- BREED (PCZ ISSUE 141)
- (PCZ ISSUE 168)
- **FAR CRY** (PCZ ISSUE 140)
- LULA 3D
- (PCZ ISSUE 165)
- S NINA: AGENT (PCZ ISSUE 134)



Shooters



HALF-LIFE 2

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one guite Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, Half-Life 2 is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranter to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam



BATTLEFIELD 2

PCZ Issue: 157 - 94% If it's online action you want, look no further. BF2 sets

the gold standard for teamthe gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.



FAR CRY PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its

tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.



HL2: EPISODE ONE

PCZ Issue: 170 - 91%

Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from HL2, Ep One nevertheless contains Ep One nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire HL series. Warm, funny and thrilling, it may be short, but the first five minutes are worth the entry fee alone.



CALL OF DUTY 2

PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

Brutal, relentless and totally Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best



F.E.A.R.

PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Rentaghost* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



BATTLEFIELD 2142 PCZ Issue: 174 - 86%

Adding bucketfuls of novelty mechanical future-warfare, BF2142 pushes the BF formula ever closer to perfection with its exciting new game mode – despite not being revolutionary by its own merits.

Strategy



PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

PLC Issue: 1/3 – 3/400
The fact that Company Of Herves has knocked Rome: Total War from its strategy throne is testament enough to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good. Essential.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a Civ game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world-



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAI PCZ Issue: 175 – 91% A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and whooping with delight as you many warriors spectacularly collide head-on with your opponents' armies. History wa never this much fun at school.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

Takes the great gameplay of RON, improves on it with elements from Civ IV and Total War and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the LOTR RTS doesn't hold a candle to the Total War franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II PCZ Issue: 144 - 90%

The strategy of Commandos meets the fun of Cannon Fodder in this top-down game of tactics. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumble of tanks never so worrying.



PCZ Issue: 175 - 88%

PCZ Issue: 175 – 88%
Proving that not all strateg, titles have to be based upor historical or fantasy setting this standalone sci-fi expansi offers tons of blood-spatter and frenetic action – no 12-sided die required.

Action/Adventure



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market Slicker than slick, breathtlaking and quite beautiful, Max Payne 2 provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and



replayable that you just won't care.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top down car game has turned into this – a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious – San Andreas is the summit of gaming achievement.



SPLINTER CELL: PCZ Issue 154 - 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, Chaos Theory takes the Splinter Cell format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies v mercs multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker – *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed name in some prepares but game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling

magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES PCZ Issue: 164 -86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide. Not that any of his outings can be considered bad games, but TTT manages to get all the ingredients just right this time around.

MMOs

ORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 - 95% Blizzards recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



PCZ Issue: 150 - 95% A Star Trek to WOW's Star Wars, FQIT gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



CHILD WADS

CULL WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 – 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbles can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%

Elite online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



CITY OF HEDDES PCZ Issue: 155 - 86%

PRZ Issue: 155 – 86% Nothing beats the feeling of spandex and fire-beams shooting from your eyes. This super-powered MMO lets you live all those heroic dreams to the full. Nietzsche would have a field day.

Simulation

Must buy!

X3- RELINION PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

Finally, a space sim to better X2: The Threat, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%

While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade



MICPOSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT PCZ Issue: 133 - 89%

No, you don't shoot things, no there's no mission structure, yes there's the best noncombat flight experience to date. History can be fun.



FREELANCER PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%

If X2 is too slow for you, Freelancer should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bountyhunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism Space has never been this much fun.



FALCON 4.0: ALLIED FORCE PC7 Issue: 158 - 82%

An example of fanbase enthusiasm saving a oncedead series. Falcon 4.0 lives on thanks to the dedication of its players. The best modern-day fighter sim on the market.

Driving/Racing



PCZ Issue: 173 - 92% Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



GTLEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 161 - 92% While GTR takes care of modern-day racing, GT Legends does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to Grand Prix Legends, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



LIVE FOR SPEED PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%

Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%

Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwoo with the car pimping though



TOCA RACE DRIVER 3

PCZ Issue: 165 - 85%

If you're into cars, this is about as essential as oxygen. With a huge collection of 35 motorsport genres, a great damage engine and realistic tracks, there's plenty of mileage in this superb racer.

God games



THE MOVIES PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%

Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/ management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2 PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%

The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



BLACK & WHITE PCZ Issue: 150 - 90%

Lionhead's controversial vision brought out your good/bad side and featured an ambitious mix of roleplaying, strategy and great AI. It can now be yours for a mere fiver, making it a god among mortals



EVIL GENIUS PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%

Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die". Bond, I expect you to die, or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



VEGA\$: MAKE IT BIG PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels. casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

EA

Sport



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007 PCZ Issue: 175 - 90%

Still reigning supreme as one of the most popular ways to fritter away the hours, the latest edition of FM has tons of improvements. The best footy management title.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

PCZ Issue: 175 - 88%

Konami's arcade kickabout is the best yet, with improved AI, fantastic animation and enhanced multiplayer. Not the Xbox 360 version, but still better than FIFA - just.



TIGER WOODS PGA **TOUR 2006**

PCZ Issue: 161 – 85%

Not the most recent version but still our favourite, *Tiger* 2006 has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 07 PCZ Issue: 174 - 84%

EA's come up trumps with the latest FIFA. PES-style controls, great ball physics and a decent management option combine with EA's usual top presentation to make this the best FIFA vet.



NHL 06 PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%

Ice hockey may not be the UK's number-one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make this 06 incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, proatbless and violent hall

RPGs



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



PCZ Issue: 137 – 94%

KOTOR is the best Star

Wars game of recent years.

Moving, dramatic and fairly
adult in tone, it also has a
hefty dose of lightsabers to
keep you happy.



THE ELDER SCROLLS

PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%

Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played – the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%

This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

PCZ Issue: 118 – 91%
It may not have the depth of Fallout, but the customisation options in this are so extensive that it's been granted a very long life. Still a wonderfully immersive game.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

Rest Of 2006

UBISOFT IL-2 STURMOVIK: 1946 PLAYLOGIC INFERNAL LOTR: BFME2 - THE RISE OF THE WITCH-KING **UBISOFT** RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS SEGA UBISOFT SONIC RIDERS STAR TREK: LEGACY

012007

ATARI ALONE IN THE DARK 505 GAMES ARMED ASSAULT EIDOS BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2
HOSPITAL TYCOON CODEMASTERS 2K GAMES CODEMASTERS CODEMASTERS JADE EMPIRE: SPECIAL EDITION LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR MAELSTROM LEXICON ENTERTAINMENT PENUMBRA: OVERTURE SAVAGE 2: A TORTURED SOUL
SILENT HUNTER IV
SPELLFORCE 2: DRAGON STORM UBISOFT **UBISOFT** JOWOOD STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL THQ MIDWAY STRANGLEHOLD ATARI TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED CD PROJEKT THE WITCHER THEY HUNGER: LOST SOULS VALVE **VU GAMES** TIMESHIFT TITAN QUEST: IMMORTAL THRONE THO TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY **EIDOS** TRACKMANIA: UNITED TBA ASCARON **UFO: AFTERLIGHT** SEGA **VIRTUA TENNIS 3** WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE BURNING CRUSADE VU GAMES VU GAMES WORLD IN CONFLICT

SCAN



SCAN.co.ul

...and it just got better...





XFX 7950GT XXX

PV-T71J-YHD9

Scan Part Code 'LN16431'

HDCP capable
GPU core Clock 610Mhz / Memory Clock 1.6Ghz
24 Pixel Pipelines
DUAL DUAL-LINK DVI supporting 2 displays up to 2560 x 1600
SLI Ready
ATI `X1900 BUSTER'







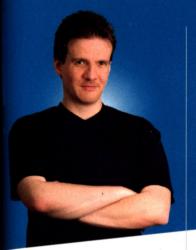
XFX has the only passive 7950 GT available











ARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Rock solid

'VE HAD TWO broken laptops to contend with this week - a brand-new HP Compag nc6320 and an old Dell Inspiron 510m - meaning I've spent what felt like nine months having wasted telephone conversations where neither party knew what was going on.

My last call to the 'support' desk at HP was answered by someone who became so disinterested in dealing with my particular problem that he asked me to call back in four hours, presumably when his shift ended. And you know what? I don't blame him. It was a relatively minor issue, and the machine in question was probably double his salary - all I could do was sheepishly replace the receiver and stare at my broken laptop in disbelief.

And you know, it's all so shortsighted. Poor quality and poor customer support are guaranteed to eat away at any company's reputation, and it's something that takes years to put right. Move call centres abroad to where the staff speak gibberish and are paid peanuts and your customers will flock to rivals.

To see what rivals are doing, I telephoned Rock with a fictitious problem about the Xtreme CTX Pro (see the review on p100). My call was dealt with in under four minutes by someone with a familiar accent and a sense of humour; to think that every Rock product has free support and a three-year warranty makes it a choice that's hard to ignore.

Phil Wand, hardware editor



WEIGHTY EIGHTY

New DX10 GeForce outclasses all DX9 hardware

NVIDIA'S £490 GEFORCE 8800 GTX and £390 GeForce 8800 GTS sidekick will play all your existing DX9 games with a pace, quality and tranquillity you simply won't believe. At 1600x1200 or higher, and with fistfuls of AA and AF, the GTX is twice as fast as the X1950 XTX - and faster even than the 7900 GTX SLI.



BFG offer a GTX aimed at the water-cooling community.

And although we've not yet seen the duo's DX10 and Shader Model 4.0 capabilities, you can be sure that the speed limitations which prevented game developers from really going to town with existing technology are now gone - thanks largely to the 681-million transistors in every G80

The new GeForce also brings new features designed to enhance the image quality in your games. The important thing is that these are now available to you with almost no performance hit - the G80 takes them in its stride. Of course. you will need Vista and a DX10 game to experience the flagship GeForce in full song, but there's not much longer to wait.

The GTX is almost 11-inches long, and has two dual-link DVI ports, two SLI bridges and two power connectors - if you're upgrading, you'll need a 450W PSU with 30A on the 12V rail.

NEWS ROUND-UP

I've had quite a few people asking whether the story about Vista being restricted to two installs was true. It was, but Microsoft have since backtracked and users will now be allowed to transfer the operating system to unlimited machines. The company recognised the fact that many users regularly upgraded their machines, and that preventing them from installing Vista on more than two of them was probably not such a good idea. microsoft.com/vista

As mentioned in our lead story, there are no DirectX 10 games available, despite the fact that the hardware for them is lounging on shelves at High Street stores. That said, the Community Zone area at NVIDIA's website offers a number of movies for download, each showing exactly what DX10 titles will look like on Vista. One of them, a strategy title called World In Conflict (from the developers of Ground Control), is enough to make you rush out and buy an 8800. Be careful. nvidia.com

OUT OF ZUNE

Microsoft's iPod rival short on features

NO GRAPHIC, NO clock, no passwordprotected volume limiter; no calendar, no address book and no bloody games. Not even a hastily cobbled-together version of Minesweeper.

The wireless works, but you can't connect to anything but other Zune devices and certainly not to the Internet. You can't even use it for USB storage.

So what does it actually do? It sounds as good as the iPod, and while not as contemporary



as the Apple, no doubt Microsoft will be throwing money at it. The question is, who wants to buy something that's sure to be made obsolete by a better version in a vear's time?

44.2 GB/S: The speed at which your graphics card goes back in time and all the frames start spilling out of yesterday. U3: The latest version of the pretentious pop group. Now meets EU Emissions Standards. VIRTUAL LAN: Draping some dirty laundry over your face while playing Quake to pretend you're surrounded by equally anti-social and habitually stinky nerds. MEMORY CLOCK: A clock you think you might have seen somewhere before, but you're not really sure. MICROPTIC KILLER: Either some form of disinfectant, a tiny assassin, or something used to blind insects. Take your pick.

ROCK

It scores well, but is that the whole story?

The Xtreme CTX Pro isn't perfect. It looks dated alongside more modern designs from HP, Dell and Sony, and the screen always seems on the dark side of 'just right', with the brightness controls having little effect up or down. But that's about it. Sound quality is top-notch and there's surround output on offer via S/PDIF. Battery life is only an issue if you're insane enough to use the thing in anger away from a power socket, and it's really not that noisy. My desktop makes far more of a racket. And of course, there's Rock's fantastic three-year warranty.



XTREME CTX PRO

PRICE £1.749 MANUFACTURER Rock WEBSITE rockdirect.com

'F YOU'RE ONE of those people who find laptops 'boring' or 'crap', you won't want to know what I'm about to tell you. Actually, you're probably not reading this at all, in which case I'm wasting my time with such a dramatic built-up. But on the off-chance this page is the one that flopped open when you needed something to concentrate on in the toilet, here goes.

They use pretty much the same Intel technology that's in your dream desktop, only with added emphasis on low power and low noise. Most of them benchmark higher than any machine you've owned before, and the Xtreme CTX Pro here, with its Go 7950 GTX, will gleefully play any game on the market. Long gone are the days when laptop LAN party-goers

would cry off certain titles because their machines couldn't handle them.

The flagship Rock sprinted past the 20,000 barrier in 3DMark03, came close to pulling 10,000 marks in 3DMark05, but couldn't quite manage 6,000 in 3DMark06. Those are big numbers, with the machine capable of a high-resolution fluidity most users would remortgage their homes for.

Thing is, when you consider the Core 2 Duo-based Xworks X81-C2D workstation (issue 175, 90%) scored 31,090, 13,931 and 8,308 marks respectively, and can be continually upgraded simply by undoing two thumbscrews and slotting in components from any High Street computer store, prospective laptop buyers will still be fraught with questions. Why can't I replace the graphics card? Why should I go the

'desktop replacement' route when my desktop already uses the same technology and yet is almost half as fast again?

Actually, who am I kidding here? This kind of performance is unprecedented in something you can unplug, slam shut and take away in a small bag. The XCTX Pro is a self-contained game stadium carrying its own 17-inch widescreen panel together with a full-size keyboard and speakers. It's a landmark machine capable of such hi-res frame-rates in Half-Life 2 and BF2142 that it makes my 'old' Dell XPS 3.4GHz desktop feel like it's running on French electricity.

Next time you look longingly at a title like Supreme Commander and wonder what kind of technology you'll need to enjoy it to its full, think of this Rock. An added bonus is that you can even take it to bed with you.

SPECIFICATION

802.11 a/b/g **Graphics 1** GeForce Go 7950 GTX 512MB **RAM** 1GB DDR2 HDD 1 Travelstar 100GB SA Optical 1 DVD-SuperMulti USB 4 ports Sound 7.1 Surround outputs OS Windows XP Home Weight 3.8kg Warranty 36 months





BUSBI 1GB

PRICE £25 MANUFACTURER Busbi WEBSITE www.busbi.biz

T'S A PEN drive, but not as you know it. The wee Busbi here is what's known as a 'U3 Smart Device', and while this technology has been around a while, I've never taken a proper look at it.

What's a U3 Smart Device? Well, if you were to watch the introductory video at www.u3.com, you'd think it was a style accessory for wankers with catalogue lifestyles: pointing at the sky, laughing into a phone, leaning against scooters. That sort of thing.

In fact, U3 is just a way of putting programs and utilities onto a pen drive so that they're treated as 'installed' on whatever PC you plug into. That means you

can set up your favourite browser and even an anti-virus suite and use them wherever you go. A password manager is also included.

The device itself is cheap and sturdy, and the U3 stuff not only works but is also genuinely useful.



BARRACUDA HP-1

PRICE £95 MANUFACTURER Razer WEBSITE razerzone.com

HE BARRACUDAS COMPRISE eight speakers: three in each cup with two mini-subs. They also feature a neat detachable mike which plugs in via a standard 9mm audio jack.

The HP-1s connect directly either to Razer's AC-1 soundcard (which you won't have), or to your existing 5.1 or 7.1 hardware via microphone, front, rear and centre leads with a USB plug to power their 330mW amp.

They work surprisingly well. They're a world away from Zalman's ZM-RS6Fs, delivering a believable surround experience in audio-rich titles such as Oblivion or Battlefield 2142. Add high comfort levels and what you're left with is an obvious choice for neighbour-friendly gaming.

Trouble is, they're less than stellar dealing with music and DVDs, and if you want to take them off and revert to speakers, you have to kneel down and mess about with wires behind your PC. Fancy some Grado SR80s instead?





ICROPTIC KILLER

PRICE £19 MANUFACTURER NOVA WEBSITE esportnova.com

HERE ARE A number of requirements for the perfect mouse pad, and the MicrOptic Killer meets all of them.

The first is size. Standard pads are tiny if you're in a BF142 tank, whose main weapon is a 360-degree turret, you need to pick up and re-centre the mouse several times to defend any 'rear action'. The Killer is not only large but has a curved shape which matches your hand's movements.

The second is non-slippery. My S&S Steelpad is rubber-flecked, but the Killer has a cellular foam which actually adheres to the desk. It does not move. The third is that it needs a bevelled edge, so you feel

when you're nearing the edge.

Last but not least, the surface needs to work with optical and laser mice. The Killer is so good in this respect that you can hold your rodent a centimetre from the surface and it'll still work.



SLIM 320

PRICE £19 MANUFACTURER Genius WEBSITE www.geniusnet.co.uk

HE SLIM 320 is a 640x480 pixel USB 2.0 web cam which had me hunting around for missing features. The packaging claims one thing and the Windows Device Manager says something else entirely.

The words 'included microphone' are printed on the front and on the side of the box, but neither Device Manager nor Windows Media Encoder were able to access it. Audio support is also absent from Genius's clunky capture software, and also from the accompanying DDPlayCam - a bundled application designed to entertain kids and swallow 100MB of your hard drive.

Although the picture quality is good, especially in artificial light, and although it'll take a decent 1.3M pixel snap, it wins little praise. Aside from the missing microphone, the cable is stupidly short and there's no mechanism to clip it to a -flat-panel screen. So you end up leaving it wobbling on your desk.





STRATECY ON A CALACTIC SCALE

"A CAME SO IMMENSE THAT SUPREME MICHT BE TOO DELICATE A WORD" - CAMESPY

CRUSH YOUR ENEMIES

ATTACK WITH GIGANTIC EXPERIMENTAL
WEAPONS AND WATCH THEM CUT A SWATHE
OF UNPRECEDENTED CARNAGE

DRIVE THEM FROM THE PLANET

EPIC, COMBINED-ARMS BATTLES TEAR
ACROSS A DYNAMIC LANDSCAPE.

WIN THE 1000 YEAR INFINITE WAR

COMMAND HUNDREDS OF UNIQUE UNITS. LEAD YOUR FACTION TO VICTORY AND WIN THE INFINITE WAR

BASK IN THE GLORY OF SUPREME VICTORY

CONQUER THE GALAXY PLANET BY PLANET, AND REIGN SUPREME



DEVELOPED BY ACCLAIMED DESIGNER CHRIS TAYLOR AND GAS POWERED GAMES SUPREME COMMANDER ESTABLISHES A BREATHTAKING NEW STANDARD IN PC GAMING AND USHERS IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF RTS GAMES.











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SUPREME

AN RTS BY CHRIS TAYLOR,

www.thq.co.uk

HOW TO... STREAMLINE WINDOWS



Want to make your Windows feel a little less sluggish? Phil Wand has a few magic tricks up his sleeve...

OT LONG AGO, a terrible plague was affecting computers. Worse than spyware, more displeasing than any virus and far deadlier than mistakenly agreeing to install the Yahoo! Toolbar, it made grown men sink to their knees and browse Apple catalogues.

It all started with something called Windows 95. Wobblier than your water-retentive grandma and in constant need of reinstalling just to stop the screen from going blue, the Microsoft 'operating system' blighted

millions. Soon after, Windows 98 was unleashed, which was basically Windows 95 teetering about in high heels pretending it was sophisticated. Then we had Windows Me, so wretched they named a chronic illness after it.

Eventually, there was Windows XP. In terms of reliability, stability and performance, XP was in a different league to any of its predecessors. But that's not to say it's perfect. There are a number of things you can do to make it feel fresher than a seashore breeze...

Dump games you never play

The first rule of any PC spring clean is that if you haven't played a particular game within the last two months, you should think about tossing it out. Even if you have more hard drive space than all the sad nerds you know put together, you should never use it to hoard crap you never use.

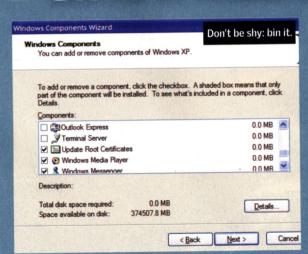
The reason for this is twofold. First, if Windows ever needs to check the data on your drive, or you are a habitual defragger, having gigabytes of rubbish lying about the place will lengthen any such process considerably. And second, if you use a tool such as Acronis True Image to clone your system, the image it creates is going to be bigger than your auntie's winter bloomers. Purge!





Windows 95 was the successor to Windows 3.1 and, all things considered, wasn't quite as bad as people now make out. It gave us long file names, the first release of Internet Explorer, and semi-decent networking. True, if you were to 'downgrade' from XP to 95 right now, you'd probably end up making chimp noises and hugging yourself, but then the same would be true if you were to move out of your house and climb a tree. It was OK at the time, but don't go back there. There's not much I can say about dear old Windows 3.0 and Windows 2.0 that you can't find out for yourself in Wikipedia. The true joy of instant Wiki knowledge is that you can convince those around you that you're a super-smart person with unrivalled experienced even though the things you speak of predate your birth and the reality is that all you do is spend a lot of time in chairs.

OP Get rid of Windows stuff too



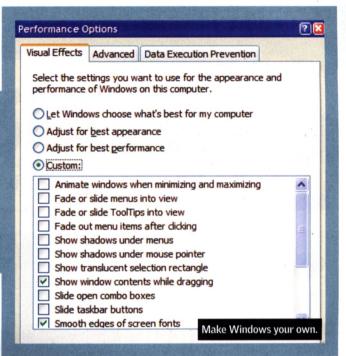
Been using XP for some time? Then you've probably gone from using a large number of its features to about three. As an example, if you installed a multi-protocol instantmessaging client such as Miranda, Gaim or Trillian, your Windows Messenger icon will almost certainly be gathering dust.

There's a way to remove bits of Windows you no longer use. Browse to your control panels and open Add/Remove Programs (if you want to save time in the future, drag the Add/Remove icon and drop it on the Start button). Click the Add/Remove Windows Components button on the left, and get unchecking what you no longer use. And if you make a hash of things, you can always put them back.

Speed up your interface

When using other people's PCs, I'm always amazed at how almost everyone leaves every XP visual effect turned on. These 'enhancements' were Microsoft's way of making their new Windows seem slick and fashionable, but more often than not these have the effect of making the whole system seem much less responsive than it actually is.

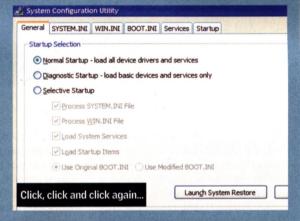
Right-click on your My Computer icon and choose Properties, then select the Advanced tab and click Performance. Now, with the Visual Effects tab showing, click the radio button labelled Adjust for best performance, and in the list below, reselect Show window contents while dragging and Use visual styles on windows and buttons. Snappy!



Seek out hidden processes

These days, most software products come with all manner of garbage that sits quietly where you can't see it, nibbling away at your PC's precious resources. Sometimes, they manifest themselves as unknown icons in the system tray, or as stupid toolbars in your browser, but quite often they run in the background without you even knowing they're there.

Click Start, then Run and type 'msconfig'. The System Configuration Utility is a standard Microsoft tool that allows you to select which programs start with Windows. Click the Start tab here and be ruthless: Google for program names listed in the Command column, and if they're not essential, uncheck the box. And next time you buy something with an accompanying CD like a video card or printer, be sure to sidestep the rubbish and opt for the 'driver-only' install.



Better browsing with Firefox

Got broadband and spend most of your time slumped in front of Firefox? There are things you can do to make sure it feels springy like a trampoline.

To start with, avoid extensions. If you've recently upgraded to Firefox 2.0, you don't need anything but AdBlock Plus. If you do go and download extras which duplicate the functionality of programs you already have, simply so you can access their features within Firefox, you're just creating potential compatibility issues and reducing the stability of the browser.

Second, select the Downloads tab in Firefox's options dialog, then click View and Edit Actions. Double-click all the Acrobat and QuickTime actions, and change them to Open with the default application. That way, next time you click a .PDF or a .MOV file, it'll open it outside of Firefox.

And last, make sure you close and restart your browser on a regular basis. It can be a huge memory hog.



Feeping creaturism

One of the things that may spur you into streamlining your system is something known as feature creep. In essence, this refers to the way often pointless ideas are incorporated into new software releases in order to make people feel they should upgrade to them. Most often associated with Microsoft products, almost all mainstream applications suffer from some degree of feature creep in an effort to attract new customers. And almost always, such things are not only shit, but they also have a detrimental effect on your computer's performance. Identify the features you don't use and disable them.

QUESTIONS QUESTIONS

Will reinstalling XP make it faster?

Not really. Windows XP is far more resilient to everyday use than anything which preceded it. If it feels sluggish, you need to run through the steps on this page and make sure you've not caught a dose of malware: make sure you use Lavasoft Ad-Aware and a free anti-virus tool such as Active Virus Shield or AVG Free Edition. Google them.

Are there any tools to help me do any of this?

Yes. The one most people talk about is Crap Cleaner from ccleaner.com, but I'd be wary of using any freeware product which claims to sweep out old and unused entries from your registry. Get that wrong and your system will be toast.

Will I be able to disable features in Vista?

Unclear – but given the way existing customisation tools are flourishing, it's quite likely we'll see a product that will enable you to streamline Vista too.

HARDWAREDEARWANDY



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



Overdone it with the spray-on tan? Other half wants you to go to a Will Young concert? Bought Baked Beans With Sausages when you meant to buy regular? We can't help with any of those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy. com, including as much info as necessary and system specs where applicable



GT FORMULA

I need your opinion on a graphics card dilemma. I want to know whether a GeForce 7600 GT is better then a 7900 GS? Is it better to overclock? I've seen the memory clocks and the core clocks, and the 7600 GT is better by far. But the 7900 GS is more expensive, so does that mean it's better?

Paul Burton

If you have between £100 and £200 kicking about, I'd go for the new Radeon X1950 Pro or the GeForce 7900 GS. The 7600 GT is a great-value midrange card, launched to replace NVIDIA's best-selling card of all time, the 6600 GT, but it's never going to be able to hold a candle to cards powered by processors from the next rung up.

While not the most scientific way of comparing video hardware, if you play Top Trumps with basic technical specifications, particularly the memory bandwidth and peak fill rate, you'll get a pretty good idea as to how they stack up in games.

If we look at the 7600 GT first, we see that it's capable of filling 6.7 gigapixels per second (GP/s), whereas the 7900 GS is capable of 7.2 GP/s and the X1950 Pro manages 6.9 GP/s. The Radeon strides out in front with its ability to shift memory about: it scores 44.2 gigabytes per second (GB/s), whereas the 7900 GS

has 42.2 GB/s and the 7600 GT puffs along at just 22.4 GB/s.

As for cost, well, the 7600 GT can be yours for little more than £110, whereas both the 7900 GS and X1950 Pro are around the £150 mark. In short, it's a tricky decision, but if you turn to the Buyer's Guide (p110), you'll be able to find out which one I'd choose.

PCI EXPRESS TO GO

I currently have an Athlon 64 3400+, 1GB DDR400 RAM, two 150GB hard drives, an Audigy card and a Radeon X800 GTO. I have two questions.

First, is my system OK for now to run the current crop of games? Second, I'm thinking about upgrading to PCI-Express some time in the new year - I'll have a budget of around £700. What do you think I should go for in terms of processor, memory and graphics card? Any help would be most welcome.

Andy Ellis

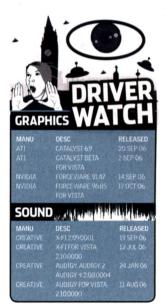
I'd say that your system isn't in need of upgrading... At least, not yet. There are new processors and new video cards just around the corner, and anything you buy now will certainly be getting on your nerves come Christmas. And while it could be argued that there will always be new stuff waiting in the wings, we're about to make two big jumps: from Windows XP

to Vista, and from DirectX 9 to DirectX 10. So whatever you choose now will have a lasting impact on what you can and can't do this time next year.

When it comes to buying new stuff in 2007, it's hard for me to say exactly what £700 will buy you. It's also hard for me to say what there will be to buy. Not only is there a high chance that the upcoming quad-core chips will depress the cost of dual-core products, perhaps by a significant margin, but every manufacturer will have released new products whose names are not

But going by today's retail prices and today's products, I'd go for a mixture from our Buyer's Guide. Take the ASRock ConroeXFire-eSATA2 (£65), Core 2 DUO E6700 (£370), Radeon X1950 Pro (£150) and 1GB of Kingston DDR2 PC2-5300 memory. I tend to gravitate towards Kingston for the same reason I gravitate towards Western Digital: I've had really good experience of them. You may have a different view, and in which case, make your purchase accordingly.

And before you whip out your calculator, all that tips you a little over budget. Still, you'll have a machine that'll knock the socks off what you have now.



wandy@dearwandy.com

dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nwl 6nw

"There are new processors and video cards just around the corner, and anything you buy now will certainly be getting on your nerves come Christmas"

So hold your horses, Andy Ellis

COKE HABIT

I would never have thought it possible for CDs to break in the drive. But today I inserted my *Command & Conquer: Renegade* disc for a spot of multiplayer, and after I heard a crack, I ejected the CD to find it hadn't shattered, but had developed two large cracks radiating from the central hole, about 120-degrees from each other. Needless to say, I was alarmed and worried.

I would like to know, was it just my disc? I remember reading in *PC ZONE* a few years back that EA discs are prone to cracking. Was it my drive deciding to go on strike and destroy anything that goes near it?

Also, my LCD screen has been gathering dust and specs of Coke. I'm not sure how tough the screen is, as I last cleaned my screen when it was a CRT a few months ago. What would you recommend?

Peter Fisher

Yes, EA really are to blame here.
I've seen a large number of
complaints from a large number of EA
customers about shattering discs, and
I've recently had the same problem
myself. You need to contact the company
direct and explain what happened,
and demand a replacement. If
everyone wrote in to complain
about everything that was wrong
with EA, they might actually do
something about it

As for the screen, I clean mine with an old T-Shirt and a little water. Do not use anything abrasive such as kitchen towels or tissues, or you'll scratch the surface permanently. Flat panels are far more delicate than the thick glass of CRTs. Do feel free to use a cleaning fluid, but only one that's free of ammonia, alcohol and other solvents. And don't press at all hard or you'll damage it.

HALF-HEIGHT: SOURCE?

Over the last few months I've noticed a drop in frame-rate on newer games such as *Gothic 3* and *Company Of Heroes*. Having a relatively stable pre-built Philips Freeline from last year, I'm trying not to invalidate what's left of the warranty by breaking the CPU fan off and painting go-faster stripes onto the melting core.

My first stop is replacing the ageing (and I reckon somewhat pipeline-disabled) Radeon X600 Pro 256MB. Trouble is, the only half-height graphics cards I can find, and even then on eBay, appear to be designed for laptops or clock in at a massive 32MB. Where might I find a specialist stockist, and would you think it safe to knock a hole in the side of my PC and jam a full-size GeForce in?

Richard Watt



50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE

18 HAMACHI

Ah, the joys of LAN gaming. Super-low pings, empty pizza boxes, a lack of deodorant and stale whiff in the air: the perfect recipe for gamer heaven. No need to wade through your game's stupid 'multiplayer lobby' system, just punch in a local address with your forehead or index finger and away you go. Wouldn't it be great to capture the simplicity of all this, only over the big wide Internet and without the need for a doctorate in packet routing?

Hamachi is the answer to all your problems (bar that unfortunate one which involves liberal amounts of emollient cream and more fresh fruit). It allows you to rig up a secure 'virtual LAN' in seconds using a series of helpful wizards. Basically, you can either 'roll your own' network and have people link up with you, or you can join an existing one. You'll be prompted for a password either way, so be sure to write it down and distribute it to your gaming chums.

Once connected, everyone is allocated a virtual IP address and can go about chatting, sharing files or shooting people with guns as though everyone were sat right next to one another.

5.58.128.216 haggis

dearwandy

- 5 51.46 128 SuPerNo
- 5.72.236.143 TinnionA
- 5.76.174.171 dirge
- 5.79.254.79 Muu_Puklip
- 5.80.130.204 reids
- 5.80.131.120 bsoltan
- 5.80.159.23 seregrail7
- 5.80.180.106 Zen Arcade
- 5.00.100.106 Zell A
- 5.80.213.177 catchamonkey

Yes, OK, so it looks a bit boring.

It even operates transparently over NAT, and if you're firmly entrenched behind your router's firewall.

The only negative is that the source code isn't available, meaning that there's a potential for secret naughtiness. That said, there have been claims that security-conscious third-parties have been shown the code, and all have nodded in approval.

From hunting around the Dixons support site, it would appear you've bought the Philips Freeline LS2300, because that's the only model with the X600 Pro. From looking at its fairly meaty specification, the video card is the only obvious drawback, but the limited amount of space inside is going to

be a problem. The fastest half-height card I know of is the GeForce 7300 GS, though even then you're losing out on a decent dollop of RAM and a second DVI port because of the small circuit board. In short, I'm not sure. The 7300 GS costs around £50, so it may be worth simply buying one and seeing which of the two you fancy.

FORUMS:

'DIRECT FROM DEARWANDY.COM

(Sparks) I bought a game from a market stall trader this afternoon and, looking at the disc, it's a DVD-R. The cover is printed and it comes in the box with a key but no manual. Are original games silver underneath like a CD? The game cover looks blurry to me. Is there a sure way to tell? (PiO2) The serial number is usually printed on the back of the manual, so you've probably been given a key that has been issued with every copy of the game sold from that stall. If you want genuine stuff, get it cheap online. Markets are for tattooed ugly people and vans filled with meat.

Here to help!

ssing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Please remember to include your name, address and contact number. and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers

It was returned covered in dust and greasy marks, and the processor still had the same problem



WATCHDOG

Not all companies are bad - but if they are, write to us for help...

ALIENWARE

THE ACCUSED: Alienware PROBLEM: Faulty new computer, can't get a refund

Deciding to splash out on a new Aurora m7700 laptop, reader Liam Lyon enjoyed his mega machine until, barely into the first week, it went wrong. The graphics card was producing artefacts and other problems, while his Athlon FX-60 was crawling along at 999MHz instead of 2.6GHz. Not only that, but as soon as Liam started playing a game or a music file, he'd get a loud buzz that wouldn't go away until he'd turned the machine off and on. After hours of speaking to someone in America on the technical helpline, they eventually determined that the machine would need to be sent away for repair. When Liam rang up to see what was going on, he discovered that they'd solved the problem by pretty much ripping everything out and replacing it, except that he would have to cough up for a discounted new soundcard to fix the buzzing issue.

When the laptop was returned, though, it was covered in dust and greasy finger marks and the screen "looked as though it had been wiped with a dirty old rag!" Liam booted it up only to find the processor was still suffering from the same problem and the wrong graphics card had been put in. Having had enough by now, Liam asked for a refund, but was told his 14-day moneyback guarantee had expired. He explained that for half of those 14 days, the laptop had been with Alienware getting repaired, and they eventually agreed to extend his money-back guarantee. Soon after, a full refund was arranged - but to his disgust,

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: After a brief period of tutting and shaking our heads in sympathy, we got in touch with Alienware, who stated: "We sincerely regret the issues



customer's system. We have refunded his payment including shipping in full and are reviewing our internal procedures so that this does not happen again."

FINAL VERDICT: Money refunded in full - there's lovely, then.

THE ACCUSED: NTL **PROBLEM: Still being billed for** cancelled broadband

Reader Chris Harding's hardly had the best of times with broadband provider NTL. After having to wait a couple of months for connection when he originally signed up, he then contacted the firm in May to cancel his contract at the end of June, as he was moving house. Despite this advance warning, however, they called him in July at his new address to ask why he hadn't paid his bill.

Chris explained the situation and the person at NTL noted this down. But in August, he received another similar call. After again explaining the situation, Chris thought he'd heard the last from NTL, but at the end of October, they sent him some mail saying he still had outstanding bills.

Unsurprisingly, Chris is not impressed: "I haven't bothered ringing them up, since it appears to have no bearing on their operations. I am now at a loss as to how people actually cancel a contract with NTL. I would have thought telling them three times would be enough, but evidently I have been signed into a life contract."

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: Another broadband complaint, eh? We contacted NTL, who responded within the hour to say that they were trying to get hold of Chris to discuss the issue. The very next day, they sent us a message saying: "We cancelled Mr Harding's account as requested, but made an administration error that meant there was a small balance remaining, which automatically generated bills to his old address. We regret the distress that this oversight has caused and have been in touch with Mr Harding to apologise and reassure him the matter is now resolved."

FINAL VERDICT: Account finally closed, and about time too.

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

BELKIN. Reader David Watson racked up nine months without the problem of unsightly wires, until one day his Belkin Wi-Fi network card just with Belkin's customer services, who asked him to return his card and paid

his postage in full. Barely a week later, he received a replacement, but in the interim, Belkin had sent out a newer version with better drivers. David was "most impressed with the customer service offered by Belkin and would happily recommend them to others"



Oh sure, shelling out bucks on those new speakers seems like a good idea. But how foolish will you feel when the debt collectors cut off your ears after you miss another mortgage payment?

HARDWARE DIVIDE

Apparatus, gear, kit, tackle, tools, machinery, paraphernalia. It's all here, on one handy page...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS X1900 XTX **EXPECT TO PAY £371**

MANUFACTURER CONNECT3D

WEBSITE www.connect3d.com

Like its GeForce 7800 GTX predecessor, our current video card champ is a reference card. It's also the fastest single device available, putting most dual-card configurations in the shade. We've chosen the Connect3D variant as it's a no-nonsense package for sensible money, making it an ideal grounding for CrossFire rigs





CORE 2 EXTREME X6800 PAY £790

MAN Intel WEB intel.com

Faster than its predecessor and faster even than any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme processor has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, its performance has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.



D975XBX EXPECT TO PAY

MANUFACTURER

WEBSITE intel.com

Gamers back away from motherboards bearing the Intel logo, but you should be reassured by the name, not put off by it. The D975XBX is a power-user product, with ATI CrossFire, eight USB holes, four SATA interfaces with RAID and eight-channel HD Audio. And it takes Core 2 Duo chips.



RAPTOR 150GB EXPECT TO PAY

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WERSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-O configuration will give you oodles of space and make Battlefield 2 really fly.



VD930 **EXPECT TO PAY**

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

WEBSITE viewsonic.co.uk

With our favourite LCD1970GX stuck at around £350, the VP930 makes more sense. It's a superb all-rounder at a fantastic price, and thanks to ViewSonic's elegant styling it looks just as commanding on your desk as the ousted NEC. It also pivots. tilts and offers 270-degrees of swivel.



SOUND **BLASTER X-FIFATALITY**

EXPECT TO PAY £140

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still ultra pricey.



Z-5500 EXPECT TO PAY

MANUFACTURER

Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

7900 GS 480M

EXPECT TO PAY £150 MANUFACTURER XFX

WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

Choosing a graphics card is never easy, except when NVIDIA takes one of their high-end G71 cards, makes a few nips and tucks and offers it with a mid-range price tag. Make sure you get the 480M Extreme version, as this is the one with faster clocks and an easygoing overclocking nature.





E6300

EXPECT TO PAY MANUFACTURER

WEBSITE intel.com

The 1.86GHz Allendale E6300 might be a stripped-down Conroe, but don't wrinkle your nose: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing performance for the money. A great entry-level buy.



MOTHERBOARD CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY £65 MANUFACTURER **ASRock**

WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from your budget-priced rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support. An awful lot of features for not a lot of money.



1200JS SATA **EXPECT TO PAY**

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

It's not like a 120GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it's more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, a couple of hundred music files and the odd porn flick will still leave plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.



VE710S

EXPECT TO PAY

MANUFACTURER **ViewSonic**

VEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

Not a lot of dosh buys you an awful lot of screen. The VE710s is a budget-priced 17in flat panel featuring an 8ms response time, 1,280x1,024 resolution and producing bright, crisp images worthy of the ViewSonic name. The company's UltraBrite technology gives rich and vivid colours in games too.



SOUND BLASTER **AUDIGY 2** VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.



P5800

EXPECT TO PAY

MANUFACTURER Creative

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.

IGUI GA OF HERO



DISCOVER THAT VANGUARD: SAGA OF HEROES IS MORE THAN A REALM OF FREEDOM AND ADVENTURE: IT IS THE PATH TO YOUR CHOSEN DESTINY



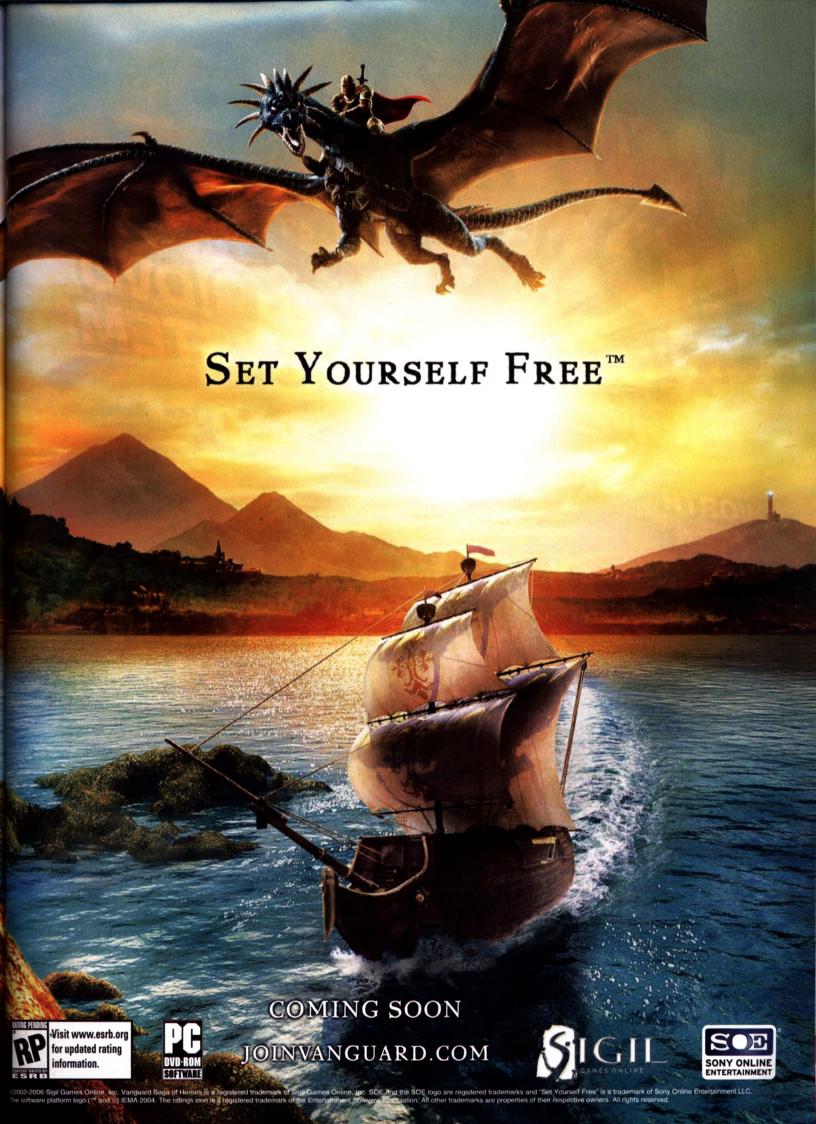
Explore a vast, breathtaking world of living art: the final masterpiece of legendary fantasy artist Keith Parkinson.



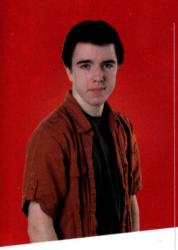
Create chains of special attacks and powerful reactions with a groundbreaking dynamic combat system.



Command the skies on your dragon, roam the world on your warhorse, or choose from dozens of other mounts.



Sony 46" HD Ready LCD TV package featuring a 5.1 Home Cinema system with HDMI connection Other features ☐ 16:9 widescreen format ☐ 700 page teletext memory □ Floor stand available ■ Wall mountable □ Picture-in-Text **Dvd home cinema system** (surround speakers, dvd) £5000 Other features □ Auto Calibration ☐ HDMI upscaling ☐ Wireless rear speakers for clutter-free sound ready ☐ CD text function ☐ Bi-wired speakers for more balanced sound ☐ Digital amplifier for crystal clear sound □ 30 radio station presets □ 1 Optical digital output(s) ☐ 143watts centre speaker power output (RMS) SONY ■ Magnetically shielded to prevent screen distortion ☐ Clock with alarm functions □ 285watts subwoofer power output (RMS) ☐ AM/FM loop antenna included ☐ Portable audio connection TO WIN JUST ANSWER THE **FOLLOWING QUESTION:** WHAT DOES THE TELEVISION TERM HD MEAN? TEXT PCZWIN THEN HIGH DRAMA SPACE, THEN EITHER B HIGH DEFINITION OR DIAL 0904 049 0257 HUGE DIMENSIONS TO ENTER



PCZONE

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Skint? Play PC games for feck all...

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH





ver the PAST couple of weeks, I've been playing *Guitar Hero* and its sequel relentlessly. My fingers are mangled, bruised and calloused, and moving my wrist creates a sound like a blender eating a spoon, but I'm happy. Also, by the time you read this I'll be swinging my limbs in all sorts of directions in a pathetic attempt to make Link run forwards on my Nintendo Wii.

But when it comes to PC games, we're forced to sit still. The most drastic physical exertions occur when the mouse gets to the edge of the mousemat, and you have to pick it up and place it back in the centre. The only callous is the one on your mousing wrist, and the joints in your fingers have rusted into a WASD position.

The PC needs an innovative gaming peripheral, some sort of motion-sensing guitar thing. Or maybe a return to big brass levers and punchcards. That'd keep you on your toes during a game of *Counter-Strike*.

Stee Hogary

Steve Hogarty, staff writer

Try this! Crazy fun music



Go to the Sid Meier's Railroads! site (www.2kgames.com/railroads) and wait for Sid Meier's eerie-looking CG face to appear. Turn your speakers up as high as they'll go. Now dance to the silly music and don't ever wonder if we'll ever fail to find something interesting for you to try every month.



114 Demo Pages

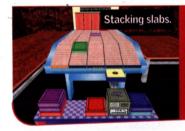
Try out the latest games right now!



116 Buzz

News and culture from a world of free PC gaming

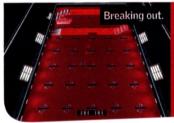




120 Freeware

The crop-cream of free Internet gaming delivered straight to your doorstep





122 **Play!**

Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons





124 Play dead!

The best zombie-themed mods and Web games around!



126 Football Manager 2007

Fancy your chances against Ferguson,
Mourinho and Wenger? Limber up here...





FREEPLAYDEMOS

Demos

On the DVD - free games galore!



PCZONE ON THE DVD Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on 01225 442244 and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email support@futurenet. co.uk, including as much

information as possible about

your system and the nature of your problem.



WARHAMMER: MARK OF CHAOS

Tzeentch, Khorne, Slaanesh and Nurgle. Gods of Chaos, or sound effects from Adam West's *Batman*? www.markofchaos.com

O YOU'VE GOT your free, totally rollable die from last month's ZONE, and after four heady weeks of rolling it onto your legs and making a pleased gurgling sound, you've probably rolled all the numbers it has to offer. Well, don't be disheartened, gentle reader put that die back into its velvet-lined box for a moment, put that box back in the wall safe and hang the Mona Lisa over the safe. Then, when you're absolutely sure your treasure is secure, you can install the Mark Of Chaos demo.

The game takes place a year after the Great War - but even if you only have a passing acquaintance with the Warhammer universe, you'll know that the gaps between wars are filled with battles, skirmishes and miscellaneous acts of violence. No one's going to make a Warhammer game where you have to start a local business and spend hours running around looking for herbs.



In the full game, you'll play as the Empire, Chaos, Skaven and High Elves; all the other races will cameo - if you'll permit us to erroneously use a noun as a verb - as the maverick dogs of war. It's almost good enough to make you forget about your free die. Almost.



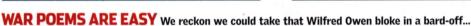


If we had a scrap, would you fancy your chances? think you are shit.' We've got another one as well. 'You call that a knife? It is tiny next to mine. Crocodile Dundee! Now that is an excellent



SONNET

'Shall I pound thee to a wretched pulp? Let me think on it for a bit. Yes, I think I probably will. [Ten lines of violent sound effects.] Stitch that, you awful bunch of sods.' Vivid, very vivid and curiously moving.





LIMERICK

We had a go at writing a limerick, but couldn't get Skaven to rhyme with John Craven without it sounding contrived. And Chaos doesn't rhyme with anything. Perhaps this war poetry isn't as easy as we thought.



SOLILOQUY

'Oh, bother and so forth. What a palaver - I've had most of my stuff cut off and it smarts like billy-o. War's great when you're killing people, but at times like this you can see why some folk think it's a bad thing.' [Exeunt]



NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON

Speed-based life forms, queue here nfs.ea.com

CAN YOU FEEL it? It's the Need For Speed. Because if you can't feel it, you were obviously born with the really boring needs, such as the Need For Food And Basic Shelter. Grow up! Real men and women need speed, with the subsidiary Need For Drift and the inevitable Need For An Analogue Controller. This demo will nurture your Need, until you're wired into



a tub full of velocity and vou'd murder a post office queue just for another couple of lousy miles per hour. Oh, vou're welcome.

SPEED-RELATED CONCEPTS 1

Not the kind of Speed with Dennis Hopper hiding in a lift



FASTING

Curiously, 'fast' also means 'to go without food'. But if Speed is your food, then you Need it. And you'll be breaking your fast by going fast. Food for thought, eh? Fast food for thought. *Taps nose cleverly*

DRIFTING

Everyone knows about drift, so this seems like an ideal time to talk about the Drifter chocolate bar, which is also a kind of food. But not very nice for breakfast. Unless you've been fasting for days. In the going-without sense.

RAILROADS! www.2kgames.com/railroads

Sid Meier chuffs off once again

FEATURING A WEBSITE with incredibly cheerful music and a disturbing picture of Sid Meier himself pushing a train into your face, Railroads! is the fourth and most marvellous of the Railroad Tycoon games.

It comes from that romantic era of trains, when a chuff and a toot meant mystery, adventure and a friendly old man with a magical box of delights. And this was before perverts, so mums could relax knowing the worst that could happen was that their kids would be shrunk to the size of a mouse and have to joust a snake with a cotton bud. I shall now recline in my nostalgia chair and contemplate the disappearance of the Spangles confection.



Trains are the future! Everyone loves trains, except for Hitler, who is on the record as saying that he felt threatened by their all-round awesomeness.

Get out of the way, you silly town – there are trains coming through! Towns are finished now that people live in amazing, wonderful trains!

Who needs goods? If we get hungry, we'll eat the train. Then build ourselves another train, and start all over again! The cycle of life goes on.

MMY CHOO

And his choo-choo shoes



TRAIN

You've probably noticed by now that Railroads! is very much 'all about the trains'. And financial strategy too



UNTRAINED

This area currently doesn't have any trains in it. But that's the beauty of the game - it's your job to fill the world with ruddy great trains.

SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT



The award for 'best scene where a man scales the outside of a tower block' goes to The Naked Gun, where Drebin accidentally window and they make a funny noise. But Sam



AGE OF EMPIRES III: THE WARCHIEFS

Before corporations, there were empires and war chiefs. That means Alan Sugar would have been a kind of warrior king, so we'd have been able to attack him with swords. Nice! www.ageofempires3.com



RACE is an acronym for RACE Against Computer Enemies. That RACE is an acronym for RACE Awesome Cars Everywhere. That last RACE wasn't an acronym; we were just shouting because we're excited. www.simbin.se

GUILD WARS EXCLUSIVE!

TAKE YOUR PETS **OUT FIGHTING**

Don't forget that your DVD box this month sports a unique code. When you put this code into Guild Wars: Nightfall, you'll be rewarded with an exclusive mini-pet. See p17 for a description of how to claim your pet that's a little more comprehensive than a vague recommendation that you "put a code in". Once you're done, you'll have an amazing Gray Giant

Oh, the fun you'll have with your new best friend! Running up and down stairs until you're out of breath, killing things in fields, laughing at other mini-pets who aren't as brilliant as yours... If the possibilities have an end, we haven't found it vet.





SAM & MAX: CULTURE SHOCK



If you haven't yet forked out the fiver required to play the first episode of am and Max's Culture Shock, perhaps this demo will help to prise the money from your mitts. If it doesn't make you come over all warm and nostalgic, then guite frankly, what will

FREEPLAYBUZZ

SNIPPETS



SCHIZOPHRENIA FUN

According to The Economist, a US professor has used Second Life, that bastion of fetishistic porn and legal limbo, to portray the mind of a schizophrenic to his students Turns out it's a lot like a Max Payne dream sequence, with random and horrifying things happening which seems quite exciting, really,



THE DEMON SANDS

Another update to Dungeons & bolstered by a whopping 40%. The Demon Sands includes new PvP combat across two modes, additional solo gameplay, new auction houses and a 10pt increase to the level cap. All they ask (or beg) of you is that you keep playing.





CHIVALRY NOT DEAD

Age Of Chivalry holds door open, pulls out chair for mod lovers

www.age-of-chivalry.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2

IT REALLY MUST have been fun living in medieval times, especially for fans of role-playing games. You could be a warrior or a mage back then (at the risk of being burned alive in the latter case), and killing bunnies for experience was a perfectly sane thing to do.



Age Of Chivalry is a medieval mod for Half-Life 2 featuring, as many medieval games do, swords, crossbows and knights. Amazingly, some of the characters look like they could've been swiped straight from Oblivion, and the sword fights, while not as intricate as

Dark Messiah's, seem to carry that same feeling of weight and impact.

Age Of Chivalry is a total conversion of Half-Life's multiplayer, planned for release sometime within the next few months - check out the movie on the website for a reason to be excited.





JUST LIKE PEAS

POD's racing through UT2K4

www.podmod.co.uk | Mod for: UT2K4

"HELLO, I'M DR BOTANICS. No relation to the shampoo. It turns out you've got a dicky bloodstream, so we're going to have to pump you full of nanobots, essentially transforming your body into the stage for a strategic FPS. Now, if you'll just stop screaming and kicking my shins, we can get started. Nurse, would you punch him unconscious, please?"

As the pictures suggest, POD is at the very beginning of its development, but the untextured models look so darn good that we almost hope they don't bother filling them in. Any game that turns the themes of Harry Kleiner's Fantastic Voyage (not to mention 1987's excellent Innerspace and, more recently, Richard 'Alive' Hammond's Inside Britain's Fattest Man) into a shooter and lets you take the role of the oft misunderstood virus is showing a refreshing originality that'll ensure our return as progress continues.

WASTE BOTH LIVES

Can't cybersex now; Lost's on secondlife.com

IN THE 1900S, everyone would just sit around having amazing conversations about cool stuff. Then radio killed the art of conversation. Then television came and danced on conversation's grave. Then the Internet dug conversation up, but all that was left of the corpse was a stupid smiley face. And now, Rivers Run Red have teamed up with Channel 4 and the Sci Fi Channel to heap insult onto conversation's

multiple injuries, by piping live TV into Second Life.

You get your gogglebox, install it in your virtual home and suddenly there's streaming telly, complete with adverts and with pay-per-view events planned for the future. So now you can ignore your online friends at the same time as your real-life friends. If things continue the way they're going, we'll have evolved our mouths completely off by 2008.

2006 MACHINIMA FESTIVAL

Is it that time again already? festival.machinima.org

IT'S STILL NOT popular enough for websites to start deleting the 'What is machinima?' question from their FAQs (sigh, movies made with games), but having come from a shack in Mesquite, Texas to a proper venue in Astoria, New York, the annual Machinima Festival reflects just how prosperous the budding industry has become.

Oddly, and perhaps mercifully for other machinima creators, Rooster Teeth's massively popular Red vs Blue series was nominated in only three categories, and won nothing. Meanwhile, the second episode of the incurably French machinima The Adventures Of Bill And John walked away with four awards, including Best Picture. Best Direction went to Riot Films' Edge Of Remorse, made using the World Of Warcraft engine, while Best Series went to The Fixer, a Sims 2 machinima.









SNIPPETS



PREY SDK www.3drealms.com/prey/ download.html

Modding for 3D Realms' shooter has been made easier with the release of the official software development kit for Prey. Now there's no limit to the changes you can make - like turning Tommy into a talking sausage, for example Wouldn't that be crazy good fun?



CALL OF JUAREZ MAP PACK

www.coj-game.com

If you're struggling to satisfy that ravenous multiplayer cowboy hunger, Techland are on hand to deliver eight more multiplayer maps for *Call Of Juarez*. And if eight maps don't satisfy you, well, we're fresh out of ideas

NEWS AT SEVEN

The machinima which will put Jon Snow out of a job www.newsatseven.com

MORE PROOF THAT we're rocketing towards a future in which robots steal our jobs comes from some clever students at Northwestern University in the US. Using technological trickery and witchcraft, they've created a fully automated newsreader-application which processes news stories gathered from the Internet, intersperses them with relevant images and comments from various blogs and - this is the

best part - presents them through Alyx Vance, who reads the news in a lovely text-to-speech-style way.

The creators seem to enjoy the absurdity of it all too, and if you ignore the inherent problems with all text-tospeech technology (that is, the weird way in which computers seem to emphasise and mispronounce words), it's clearly a fantastic and novel idea. It'll never beat BBC Breakfast, though.



SUPREME COMMANDER

On our DVD this month we've hidden a nifty Supreme Commander movie featuring the enthusiastic Chris Taylor, whose vibrant and thrilling descriptions of the epic upcoming RTS had us quite literally on the edge of our seats. So much so that we reckon he could



Chris Taylor in his hilarious role as Chris in next year's hit sitcom *That's* So Chris!.



Chris Taylor emulates Robert De Niro in his upcoming Mafia flick Taylor Made Man.



Chris Taylor blasts onto the rap scene with his debut single Yo Yo, Check Dis Flow.



Chris Taylor as CEO of Gas Powered Games. Probably the safest place for him.

LOOK WHO'S TOLKIEN

Lord Of The Rings: Total War lords it up, starts war snipurl.com/11q2m | Mod for: Rome: Total War

ONCE YOU'VE HEARD the words together, this mod is so obvious that you can barely believe you haven't done it yourself. Something about programming skills and artistic talent, we shouldn't wonder. This LOTR: Total War mod has been in production for 18 months now - the beta's available for download, but it's a work in progress.

Now the connection has been rudely forged, you won't be able to watch a bunch of ents whipping orcs without wanting to pause the action, and when

you're re-enacting the Battle of Agincourt in Medieval II, you'll have to fight the urge to skateboard up the parapets.

There are 14 factions, ranging from the obvious elves and orc rabble to the more obscure easterlings and southrons. Moreover, they're not just different graphically; each has its own strengths in battle. With ambitious plans for a Middleearth campaign map that will reproduce the war of the ring, even Gandalf would have to take six steps back to admire the sheer dedication that's gone into this mod.







(4) 75 10 0



OLD REPUBLIC, RESTORED

The Sith Lords Restoration Project gets under way www.team-gizka.org | Mod for: KOTOR |

IT'S A SHAME Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic II - The Sith Lords wasn't as great as it could have been. It's also a shame that it has a colon, a hyphen and a Roman numeral in its title, but the biggest injustice of all is the fact that so much of the game was simply lopped off like a cancerous cyst due to time constraints (or something).

Don't let the cancer simile put you off, though - the missing content is actually quite good, and the folks working on The Sith Lords Restoration Project are planning on slotting it all back into place using actual leftover sound clips and action descriptions to form a coherent story. Their forthcoming mod will include such greatness as the long-lost HK Droid Factory, several ways to murder Visas, a whole new group of people wanting to kill you, various ways to be responsible for the deaths of all your party members (excellent) and multiple endings.

It's best to avoid dwelling over quite why these things never made it into the finished (read unfinished) game, but Team Gizka intend to stick things back together as best they can using nothing but original content. Keep checking the website for more.



Jedi mistake #72: looking

FREEPLAYBUZZ







IN-FLIGHT MOVIE

Mackie winner The Adventures Of Bill And John actually really good billetjohn.free.fr

NOT THAT WE'RE immediately sceptical of any machinima that hasn't come from Rooster Teeth, but there are so many badly made movies that loading up an unknown one is a complete gamble. Thankfully, The Adventures Of Bill And John: Danger Attacks At Dawn is a safe bet,

winning four awards at this year's Machinima Festival, and using the unlikely Lock On: Modern Air Combat engine as the means to produce its comedy-action stylings.

You won't be rolling in the aisles with laughter (or at least the bit of floor in front of your desk), but there are some smile-out-loud scenes, and the fact that it's all in French with English subtitles masks any bad voiceacting that may or may not exist. The level of production is astounding too; the film features possibly some of the best editing we've seen in a machinima piece vet. Worth watching.







ON YOUR LEFT, A GOBLIN

Synthravels offers you a software package holiday www.synthravels.com

IT'S EASY TO get lost in the dayto-day routine. You sit down to your meal of stringy wolf meat - same as yesterday. Then you go on a mission to kill some of the local wildlife - same as yesterday. There must be something more to life in an MMO than this.

Well, indeed there is. Why not relax and be guided around Norrath, Rubi-Ka or whatever fictional world you pour your life into? Simply visit the Synthravels website and you'll be matched to a highlevel guide, who'll show you the places of interest, tell you about the history and open your eyes to all the things you normally take for granted.

It's innovative, free and you don't have to wear a stupid yellow jacket. And if you see any tourists on your travels, give them a sexy emote from us.







GOLF?

www.golfguestionmark.com A beautifully surreal and artistic rendition of the classic sport. Obscenely funny with two players and a fantastic



www.harveycartel.org/metanet/n.html Old-school platforming mixed with are stylish, but N's inertia-harnessing physics are gloriously entertaining.



RROOTAGE

snipurl.com/rRootage Concentrate your fire on procedurally-generated bosses while avoiding massive amounts of bullets in what we reckon is Kenta Cho's best shooter



NETHACK

www.nethack.org A real oldie, but still as deeply involving now as it was back then. Some aspects of this freeware RPG classic have simply yet to be bettered.



NARBACULAR DROP

www.nuclearmonkeysoftware.com We only love this because we can't play Valve's Portal right away, but this mind-boggling dimensional puzzler is simply amazing to play.



FERNATE PCZONE ON THE DVD



Steve Hogarty is an agent of the free

Pack some plax as a plax-packing plax packer, today! Dev: xCept | www.m3dr.com/projects/packin_plax

Freeware brings you the best free games content the Net has to offer - you'll never have to buy a game again. This month, pack some plax in a perplexing puzzler, ride a line (rather than walk it) and defend the world from terrorism by making people take off their shoes.



LOGIC **Bafflingly** charming

Dev: Unidentifiable Japanese person snipurl.com/pcz_logic

TO DOWNLOAD LOGIC.

go to the url above and click the link which begins with 'HTTP'. Once downloaded, you can control your little Pikachu-type character using the arrow keys, and use most of the bottom row of letters on your keyboard to do various things like jumping and picking things up. Once you've picked something up, hit TAB to enter it, and then jump on

the hovering map and hit TAB again to enter the level.

That's the easy part. Logic is supremely confounding, and there's no instruction as to what you're actually supposed to be doing, but there's something oddly compelling about finding out for yourself. Also, the yellow guy you play as can glide around the levels. Why? Who cares, it's fun!

WE DON'T KNOW what plax is, but we do know that this freeware puzzler's premise makes a bit more sense than Klax, the game it's based on. In Klax, coloured slabs come tumbling down a pseudo-3D conveyor belt on one of five rows, and you position your receptacle in such a position as to catch these slabs, before moving to a desired position and dropping the slab on the platform below.

The objective is to create a row of three or more same-coloured slabs either horizontally, vertically or diagonally (I know rows are by definition horizontal, but I'm trying to keep this description snappy). Anyway, the whole thing was in space or a forest or something, and it never really made sense.

Packin' Plax though, sees you working in a factory for a packing company. Utilising the most efficient packing technology available, you have to pack the plax (slabs), as your score gets higher you get promoted (increase in level), and the game becomes more and more difficult until you can no longer handle your responsibilities as a plax packer and are



Packin' Plax is a near-perfect puzzler that remains every bit as addictive and fun as its retro predecessor



fired for dropping more than five plax or letting the platform fill up. What a horrible, unforgiving nightmare of a job.

Luckily, it's a job we love to pretend we have for a few minutes at a time. Packin' Plax is a near-perfect puzzler, arranging same-coloured slabs to form a 'Big X' is still the same challenge it was way back with Klax, and it remains every bit as addictive and fun as its retro predecessor.



FREEPLAYFREEWARE

RAY-HOUND

Bark at the moon

Dev: Hikoza T Ohkubo | www18.big.or.jp/~hikoza/Prod/index.html

MUCH LIKE AIKIDO uses the momentum of an enemy's attack against them, Ray-Hound is all about deflecting laser blasts back at the enemy rather than firing your own. Unlike Aikido however, you'll rarely find yourself pinned to the ground by a sweaty man in his pyjamas, as a crowd of people watch you with cruelly judging eyes.

Instead, you control a ship entirely with your mouse as stationary turrets appear about the circular arena. Your forcefield ability allows you to capture the enemy laser blasts and watch them orbit around you in fancy arcing patterns before finally unleashing them back at the unsuspecting turrets.

It becomes complex once you've got multiple clusters of turrets simultaneously attacking you, and when the clusters become so large that they begin to surround you completely, allowing you to take them all out with a single well-timed click. The mouse-driven controls are fluid and perfectly intuitive too, and the penalty system which takes seconds from your countdown timer as you get hit comes straight from Warning Forever, Hikoza's previous shoot 'em up.

Sharp movements of the mouse in any direction allows you to actively bounce laser blasts back at their senders, and swirling the mouse in circles does absolutely nothing except ineffectively deflect lasers in random directions. And that's pretty much it. The Aikido analogy









AIRPORT SECUR

Cucumbers wrapped in tinfoil not included

Dev: Persuasive Games | www.shockwave.com/gamelanding/airportsecurity.jsp

HOW EDGY IS this, a game which satirically attacks the state of airport security, or should that be airport insecurity? Ahahah. But seriously, what's better than poking fun at the stringent security measures everybody must go through to hop on a plane these days?

In Airport Security, you're the security guy at a security checkpoint, the last defence between the free world and

those wacky extremists. You must keep up with the rapidly changing list of prohibited items, which often includes trousers, shirts, hats, ice-cream, mobile phones, pressurised cheese and toilet seats. Kerazy! As each passenger walks past, you must remove these offending items before sending them on their way. Letting somebody through with something they shouldn't have means

you lose Security points, while taking something that's actually allowed means you lose Rights points.

All the while the queue gets longer, until eventually you can no longer handle your responsibilities as a security guy and are fired for letting the queue grow too long or failing to uphold security measures and/or civil rights. What a horrible, unforgiving nightmare of a job.

WEBGAME OF THE





Dev: *fsk Web: www.linerider.org

Line Rider takes sledding, a typically three-dimensional sport, and renders it in stunning 2D. It takes snow and replaces it with lines, glorious lines. And it takes broken collarbones and swaps them with harmless physics. You draw a line from the top-left corner of the screen to the bottomright, press play and watch as your sledder sleds down the slopes. You can't control the sled either, so particular care has to be taken when designing your course, as an errant bump sends your rider flying. Once you get the hang of the basics, you can try loops, jumps and various tricks – but the lack of an undo button (which appears in other versions of *Line Ride*, dotted about the Internet) makes the whole process a matter of trial and error. Still fantastic fun though.

BLOCKSTORM





Jon Blyth kicks, blocks, it's all in the mind snipurl.com/pcz_block | Mod for: Half-Life 2

IN 1989, IF you said "Doh!" to your friend, people wouldn't say, "Aha, excellent impression of Homer. Let's quote The Simpsons for the next halfhour!" No, they would have screamed and tried to fend you off with a pingpong ball. That's because Doh was a mysterious and terrifying entity designed solely to add plot to the Breakout clone, Arkanoid. It's 2006 now, The Simpsons are approaching their 400th episode and we don't need stupid excuses to enjoy a bit of whimsical retro gaming. We do, however, need Valve's Source Engine.

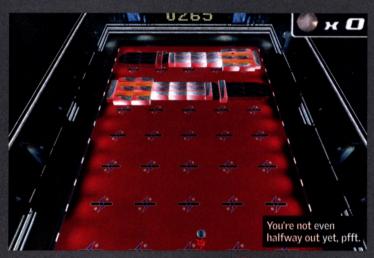
Blockstorm is notable for being the first Source mod created solely with Valve's Hammer editor, and is a fantastic showcase for what you can do without using any code whatsoever. It may play like a drunken moose, but we don't care.

There are three options for playing. Challenge 1 puts you through some familiar Arkanoid levels, while Challenge 2 sees you demolishing renditions of the HL2 arsenal. Pong Mode - complete with an excellent Tekken-style VS screen - lets you play against a mate or the Half-Life cast. It's better against a human, as the AI only seems to lose when it just forgets to move.

Admittedly, the ball moves in a bizarre, frustrating and semipredictable way, and it's baffling that you're restricted to keyboard controls (even Pong had an analogue controller. for god's sake). However, for working in a confined space, Blockstorm gets a big medal and a ping-pong ball in the chops.









MURALIS Combo-mania

www.ascensiongames.com Mod for: UT2004

IF YOU LIKE a massive combo - and the word around town is that you're crazy in love for super-long combos then you might once have loved Muralis. It's not been supported for a while, but it offered spectacular gun and swordplay in that Devil May Cry vein, with Tekkenshaming combos that could in theory – be connected forever. It had one hurdle: a steep learning curve on the combat that led to a woefully inefficient mashing of the controls. But it's just a new motor skill to learn, like juggling and backflips. Once you're there, you'll be stringing together some dazzling moves that you'd want to tell everyone about, before realising they probably wouldn't care. It looked great, it played - well, it played challengingly, let's say - and it's a damn shame it's dead.

MERCILESS MOD

Steve Hogarty vomits with disgust - ban this sick filth!

www.mercilessmod.com | Mod for: Call Of Duty 2

WAR IS harsh. War is a cruel mistress. War rears up like an enraged manatee, and spits in your face like a dog would if dogs could spit. War is a total bitch, and it's far harsher and crueller than Call Of Duty 2 would have people believe. Much like in war movies when directors get a bit gore-happy, the Merciless Mod adds far, far too much ugliness to what was a relatively enjoyable war to begin with, and all under the pretence of sobering realism.

But let's not kid ourselves: the reason that guy's arm came off at the start of Saving Private Ryan is because Spielberg thought it would look wicked (and it did): and the reason these Germans made this mod is because people puking and spitting blood after being shot in the chest is also wicked, if a little icky. They've also added firebombs (with real burning skin effects) and sticky bombs, and artillery strikes that properly mangle bodies. It's so thorough, it borders on fetishism. Take that, Daily Mail.





BOTS Jon Blyth plays with robots that transform... Into bigger robots

bots.acclaim.com | Standalone

BOTS ISN'T WHAT you'd usually find in these pages; it's not a bedroom-crafted labour of (often misguided) love, crafted by teams forged from forum posts that read: "I've drawn a brilliant Wookiee, is anyone here a coder?" Bots is from the big boys at Acclaim, and it claims to be a MMORPG for all ages. And it's fun - even if 'all ages' necessarily means 'simple'.

The first thing you'll notice playing Bots if you head straight into a PVE sector mission - is the fact it's a pure arcade game. Even down to the Final Fight-style choice of three characters. Once you're in a mission, it's a few minutes of up-downleft-right-jump-attack-block-transform. It's instantly familiar, instantly accessible and if you've managed to join a party of eight people - utterly chaotic. After only a few games and minor power-ups, you're fighting with a little less lunacy.

You can let the server put you in a room, and when the seemingly random player-matching doesn't cause you to get immediately booted by a sneering superior, it seems to force everyone into friendliness.

You'll find Level 30 beefcakes joining in on the baby maps - knowing they'll get a paltry 1xp for their troubles. On the other hand, the big boys often let you play with them on their maps, resurrecting you after the boss-fight, so you can pick up your experience. When the red treasure box appears, it's every man for himself. Teamwork is no match for upgrades.

Freeplay purists, look away now. Bots may be free to download and play, but this is a business venture, and only the fat cats get free lunches. The game will sell items for real cash, and although it's non-compulsory, the in-game currency is earned pretty slowly. Luckily, my 'I'm a noob idiot' act earned me enough pity donations to keep me going. Also, advertisements begin and feature -throughout every level - but they're out of the way of the action, and it's difficult to get angry when you're playing for free.

It's good fun, and well worth a couple of hours; but it's hardly deep enough to warrant the title MMORPG. It's more like Gauntlet: Dark Legacy with a pinch of GoBots, and power-ups you get to keep.



Lava: ruining computer

metaphors since 2006.



PLAYING DEAD

ELLO. THIS IS Steve Hogarty reporting from a horrible future in which zombies have overrun all our cities and some of our magnificent spacestations too. I have submitted these pages to my editor through a time machine, so that I might warn you present-day folk of

the upcoming zombie hordes and their highly anticipated capabilities, all via the medium of some of the best free zombie-themed mods and webgames. Now hurry, the zombies are already attacking our wind farms and hydro-electric power plants, and terrifying our giant cube-shaped cows...

ZOMBIE STRIKE: SOUR



Counter-Strike, with zombies, in the Source engine, you see how it works?

ferus.shackspace.com/zombie_strike.html | Mod for: Counter-Strike: Source

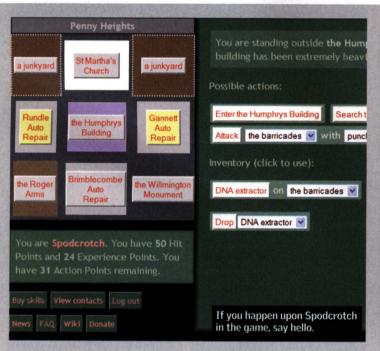
ALL IT TAKES to unlock an immense amount of zombie-orientated hilarity in Counter-Strike: Source is a tiny script. The Zombie Strike script weighs in at about one-point-diddly-squat kilobytes: simply drop it into the right folder and watch as the online shooter's bots freeze mid-step, and begin to act even more like mindless drones.

With their newly wired AI routines, the bots will exclusively use knives in their quest to eliminate you. Stick yourself and a mate on one team, fill the other 30 slots with the flesh-hungry undead and see how long you can last without getting your brains sucked out. It's brilliant, terrifying and panicky fun - and finding yourself backed into a corner with a shotgun is one of the coolest moments we've had in Counter-Strike.

OK, so the zombies still look, move and run exactly like terrorists and counterterrorists, but suspending your disbelief is easy. If you want to enhance the experience you can find replacement zombie models, but we don't think it's needed. The sight of 30 terrorists swarming about de_aztec is enough excitement for us.







URBAN DEAD

Massively multiplayer online shambling corpse 'em up www.urbandead.com

IF WE KNEW how, the PC ZONE team could make the best game ever. Once finished, we'd show it to our rivals and they'd begrudgingly have to give it 96%. This game would be called Zombies Online, and it would be an MMO where everybody's a survivor in a city overrun with the undead.

Urban Dead is close enough - it's a browser-based online game developed by a bloke in Brighton and played by thousands of people. That means it's almost as popular as Fatboy Slim.

You choose to play as a human or a zombie, and as you roam about the quarantined city you gain experience

with which you can buy skills but you know all that already.

What makes Urban Dead so fantastic is just how deep it is: buildings can be barricaded to act as safe houses, medics can give first aid, but if they're in a hospital with power they can perform surgery. The only downside is its intrinsic AP-based gameplay - that is, you've got 50 action points with which to do things (be that moving, attack zombies, whatever), and every half-hour you earn a single action point. A bit restrictive, sure, but it's free - so stop picking holes, you pedant.

FREEPLAYPLAY

THEY HUNGER TRILOGY

Would they like a side of fries with that? www.blackwidowgames.com | Mod for: Half-Life

THIS TRIO OF mods for the original Half-Life was so excellent that their next release, They Hunger: Lost Souls, will be sailing on to Steam in the near future. As you could probably guess from the title, the originals see you fighting against at least one hungry zombie who hungers for what we can safely assume is brains, or indeed human flesh.

You play as a disenchanted writer trying to find inspiration by going to live in a creepy old shack for a while, but inspiration will be the least of your worries when those kooky creatures start attacking. When all three chapters are stuck together, it's really quite a lengthy and terrifying experience, and definitely one worth reinstalling Half-Life for. There's also no finer way to prepare yourself for the parade of terror which will be Lost Souls.





DIVINE INTERVENTION

It's not killing if they're already dead

divine-intervention.freeonlinegames.com



I'M SO CLUELESS about zombies that when I saw the scene in 28 Days Later where the survivors spy some horses running happily through some fields, I was convinced they were zombie horses and that one horse was trying to bite the other.

Luckily, Divine Intervention is a bit more straightforward with its zombies. You're a priest with a gun, and you must defend yourself from legions of possessed folk. Kids with knives, men who won't think twice about tearing your arm off and ramming it through your chest and demonic priests - it's all fair game when it's the apocalypse. For a side-scrolling webgame, it's actually quite good. Bonus points for being perfectly clear on who the zombies are too.



ZOMBIE INFECTION SIMULATOR

It really, really, really could happen

kevan.org/proce55ing/zombies

I HAVE TO give this a mention because it's the perfect opportunity for anybody to slam their palms on the desk and shout: "Dammit senator, if you don't act now their won't be a city to save!", before pointing at your Zombie Infection Simulator and reeling off a list of long scientific words. "My god," your audience will say, mouths agape: "If your calculations are correct, then that means..." - SMASH! Then the zombies smash through the window and bite everything, rending flesh and the like.

This Zombie Infection Simulator shows how quickly panic spreads throughout a city, and how the zombies capitalise on the fear of humans. Check out the links on the Web page for a 3D version, and a version which lets you nuke the city. It's basic, but it's oddly interesting and based on actual scientific fact, so there.

A copy of Football Manager 2007 An understanding partner Vhat you'll get: Adulation from your supporters Loads of shiny cups Top players wanting to join your team

Manage with style in... Football Manager 2007

Martin Korda might not be able to manage much, but he does know how to manage a football team...

> TUCK IN MID-TABLE obscurity? Hated by your supporters? Unable to mastermind victories in those must-win derby games? Then fear not, as help is at hand with our ultimate guide to becoming a successful manager in the latest version of Sports Interactive's supreme management series. By the time we've finished with you, you'll have Ronaldinho, Henry and a host of other potential Chelsea targets banging on your door begging to be signed while you comb your hair in the reflection of your bursting trophy cabinet. Well, that's the plan, but football's a funny old game...

Give individual players specific duties and instructions.

OD GET PERSONAL

Yes, yes, football's all about the team and not the individual, but setting your side up to play a defensive 4-4-2 counter-attacking game will only get you so far. If you really want to see your team reaching its full potential, you're going to have to get used to issuing individual players with specific instructions. This means researching not only their stats, but the opposing team's too. Does an opposing forward need to be man-marked? If so, do you need your fastest or tallest defender to keep him quiet? It's decisions like these that can make the difference between a plucky loss and a heroic win.



02 Manager's pet

Admit it, you've sometimes selected your favourite player no matter how badly they've been playing or whether or not they fit your system. Am I right? Course I am. Well stop it! Now! You see, there simply isn't room for favouritism in FM2007. If one of your heroes isn't delivering, drop them. If they don't fit into your system, then consider selling them, doubly so if they've only got a couple of years left at the top before that slow, inevitable decline. Cash in before it's too late and bring in two promising youngsters instead. It works for Wenger and it can work for you.

SEND OUT THE SCOUTS

How often have we heard a promising youngster labelled the new Maradona? And how often do they end up warming the bench for some Conference side? Pretty often, right? So before you get caught up in any mass hysteria surrounding an up-and-coming youngster or embroiled in a bidding war for some Argentinian whizz-kid, make sure you scout them at least three times to see if they really are the real deal. What's more, make sure you always keep your scouts busy, as you may well unearth a gem. Sending scouts to nations that they have specialist knowledge of will often vield the best results too.



04 GET RID

Perhaps they were good when you bought them. Or maybe you've been saddled with a bunch of overpaid no-hopers. Either way, most squads will have their fair share of underachieving star players that suck up your wage budget and prevent you from offering new players the kind of salaries they're after. Your headache is made all the worse by the fact that no-one wants to buy any of your prima donnas. In these situations, there's only one option. Loan them out to anyone willing to pay at least 60% of their wages to free up some much-needed funds. Hopefully, they'll prove themselves while they're away and someone might actually want to buy them. Hopefully.





OS Strength in depth

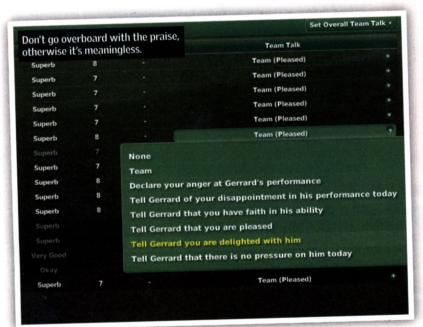
Unless you're managing the likes of Real, Chelsea or Inter, it's unlikely that your squad will have much depth. While it's tempting to splash your cash on one starplayer, it's worth remembering that should they get injured, your squad will be no stronger than it was before. If your player roster is looking a little threadbare, try investing in four or five quality players, making sure that you have two capable squad members to cover every position. That way, should one get injured or suffer a loss of form, you always have a ready-made replacement.

OF GETTING DIZZY

A season is a marathon not a sprint, which is why you should never underestimate the importance of rotating your squad. Now this doesn't necessarily mean going 99 games without naming the same line-up Benitez-style, but it does mean intelligently making use of your entire squad. Try giving your squad players and the odd promising youngster a run out during less important cup matches, and even during home matches against weaker sides. Not only will you keep them sharp, you'll also be surprised how much fresher your first-team players are.

OT Spare not spoil

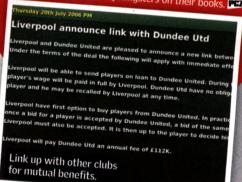
We all like to dish out praise – it makes us feel all fuzzy inside. However, beware of being too liberal with the superlatives when praising your players. While the occasional commendation will do wonders for a player's confidence, doing so too often will soon see your players shrugging off your eulogising with disinterest. What's more, if one of your players isn't pulling their weight on the pitch, don't worry about criticising them. It might just shake them out of their malaise and may even prompt them to play better than ever. Just make sure it's justified.





08 AFFILIATION

If you're the kind of player who prefers managing lower-division sides, then make sure you don't overlook the game's new affiliation options. Latching onto a larger club can be invaluable when seeking to bolster your squad, something that's often difficult (if not impossible) when you're working on a shoestring budget. Ignoring this feature when managing a larger team would also be a mistake, though it's important to choose your feeder clubs carefully. Look for ones playing in respected divisions (so that your loaned-out players can be properly tested), and ones that also have several talented youngsters on their books. 🖼



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Fight Club Min

The seventh rule of Fight Club is... Hit F10 for screenshots

THERE'S NOTHING QUITE like being pwned by your loving readership, even if these days you have to take out a small loan to afford decent weaponry. So it was that the full cast of the PC ZONE sitcom turned up in cs_italy to be repeatedly shot in the head.

Notable events included threats of an employment tribunal as Log directed one too many head shots at his boss. and later on, a rather unsportsmanlike 'three balaclavas and a camper van' terrorist tactic on de_dust. The next Fight Club is at 6pm on Thursday December 7, when we'll be playing the excellent HL2 SourceForts mod which we urge you to download from www.sourcefortsmod.com.



/me talks enthusiastically about online chat with nice people like you

IN A CHAT that saw Will desperately trying to steer the conversation away from Log's new-found obsession with drawing 'the male member' in the train tracks, lakes and Roman villas of the games he reviews, much other conversational ground was covered.

That said though, editor Sefton being voted the tenth least hideously ugly games journalist in the UK was barely touched upon. To the chagrin of some, titles from

other platforms than the beloved PC were discussed (mainly to argue how PS3 is shit, mind), but it was probably the presence of a lady called Labtech that made it such a special day.

A wonderful, shiring and beautiful ray of light on an otherwise dreary November evening, this splendid lass offered wry and witty commentary on how shit everything was, which brought a skip to the step and warmth to the heart. We hope she enjoys the ZONE Chat compo's first prize of a pristine copy of Glider Simulator as much as she can, while the far more polite AssassiN revels in his second prize of Need For Speed: Carbon. Rofl.

The next ZONE Chat will be at 5pm on Wednesday December 6. There'll be a special Christmas compo, and we'll all be wearing tinsel in our hair. So be there! Or perhaps be on the way home from work!

How to join in!

If you fancy joining the ZONE Chat, then you'll need an IRC program and a Net connection. We recommend mIRC, and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install the program, set the options, devise an online identity that'll make you stand out from the crowd, connect to a QuakeNet server

nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club perhaps due to your impotent rage at The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion being passed over by the BAFTAs then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. ZONE staff might even be there. The latest info can always be found. at www.zonegames.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

SWAT 4 swat 4.zonegames.co.uk

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE cs1.zonegames.co.uk:27015 cs2.zonegames.co.uk:27025 cs3.zonegames.co.uk:27015

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH nl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085 6 BATTLEFIELD 1942 DC MODDED

dc.zonegames.co.uk:14567

TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045

WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY et.zonegames.co.uk:27960 **TOURNAMENT 2004** ut1.zonegames.co.uk:7 ut2.zonegames.co.uk:8888

It's getting quite

worrying really.

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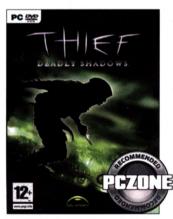
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Come on, the Welsh! Responsible for condoms, putting beer into tins and one criminally forgotten computer...

DRAGON 32/64



BUT HOW?

Here come four colours

T3 used to be the only emulator for Windows. but sadly, it's geared more towards DOS 6.2, so playing the games in XP, you're unlikely to get sound. XRoar is more up-to-date and works on virtually every platform. This includes the handheld GP32, if you want to play Dragon Invaders in a taxi or something. As you'd expect, XRoar isn't as huge a project as, say, MAME, but it's supported by the authors of some of the original games.

Links...

XRoar

xnipurl.com/pcz_xroar
XRoar is Ciaran Anscomb's
emulator, and the one we'd
recommend to start with.

O Dragon Archive

www.dragon-archiveonline.co.uk

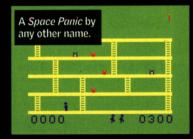
A community made up of archivists, enthusiasts and old Dragon developers.

PUB NOSTALGIA HAS its limits; Spectrum, fine. C64, ST, Amiga, even the Vic 20 gets a mention. All too absent from nostalgic masturbation orgies is Port Talbot's finest export, the Dragon computers. They sold well for a while, but the death that followed was drawn out over an accumulation of errors and increasingly stiff competition from more-coloured rivals.

The Dragon was respectable enough, but by no means a powerhouse. It had better sounds than the sorry beeps of the Spectrum, but left the mustard resolutely uncut when sat next to the C64. So was it purely nostalgia that led Simon Hardy to set up the Dragon Online Archive to preserve what memories remain of the ill-fated, unfeted beast? Why does Dragon deserve our love?

Simon says: "The Dragon had a proper keyboard, a great BASIC manual, it could be expanded easily and was much more than just a games machine. It even had a simple desktop publishing program.

Joust: still costing money on Xbox Live Arcade.





With the Dragon 64's operating system, even more professional software came out - spreadsheets, C, Databases etc. And the National Dragon Users Group was a funny and friendly place.

User-friendliness and expandability are two worthy features; unfortunately, they don't carry much currency in the playground, and as the mid-'80s approached, the Dragon was slowly

conveyor-belted to oblivion. However, the fact that Simon's a senior IT consultant and I'm writing this page possibly goes some way to explaining the benefits of the forgotten machine.

If you're missing your old Dragon - or perhaps you bullied someone who owned one and you're after a way of apologising to them - download Xroar and play Chuckie Egg with a whole new palette.

SIX OF

Simon Hardy gives his own personal recommendations
for the games that show off
the Welsh wonder's talents...



CHUCKIE EGG

Classic seed-collecting hen farce. "Quite possibly the best version of this game on any platform.'

RETURN OF THE RING Adventure gaming's

Tolkien-mash: "An excellent RPG game from Wintersoft.'



BACKTRACK

A top-down maze game in which you play a mophaired sphere with a boner for collecting keys.



ROMMEL'S REVENGE

Wireframe tanks against a mountainous horizon. "This is a great adaptation of the classic Atari game."

An isometric game from Cornish developers Microdeal – big supporters of the Dragon.



to have deprived the Welsh of 8-bit's ubiquitous miner made good.

NOW & THEN



Resident Evil 4 vs Zombies Ate my Neighbours





IF YOU THOUGHT we'd run out of ways to mention zombies, then you underestimate our ability to shoehorn the shambling twats into any conversation. You might be breaking the joyful news that your wife has become pregnant, and we'd just reply: "What, like in Day Of The Dead when she dies and it's a zombie and it's amazing – what if your wife's dead, that would be so cool."

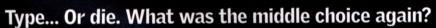
Anyway, Zombies Ate My Neighbours was the inspiration for Shaun Of The Dead's garden trampolining scene, which makes it a part of popular culture as important as unmasking the villain at the end of a spooky adventure. As good as Resident Evil is, they're not even real zombies. Whatever a real zombie is. As far as we're concerned, you're not a zombie if a) you're a massive fish, or b) you dodge bullets and take orders from some Napoleonic midget. So, in conclusion, download the excellent Zombies Ate My Neighbours – it's got zombies in and is dead good.

PLAY IT!

Zombies Ate My Neighbours was available on the SNES and Mega Drive. Seeing as we did the Mega Drive recently, here's how to run it on the SNES...

- For emulating SNES games, may we humbly recommend ZSNES, available at SourceForge: sourceforge.net/projects/ zsnes/
- 2 Instructions are provided at the site, so all that's left for us is to be traditionally fauxcoy about the legality of emulation.
- Watch out, it's a policeman! Policemen hate it when you play old games without a letter from US Gold, or someone like that.
- Bear in mind that emulating games is the moral equivalent of reaching into developers' throats and pulling the dinner out of their stomachs.
- After playing Zombies Ate My Neighbours, please report yourself to FACT, who will administer a lethal injection.

THE TYPING OF THE DEAD



Developer: Sega | Year: 2000 | URL: snipurl.com/10g20



THE DREAMCAST KEYBOARD was a bit rubbish. You could surf the dial-up Net if you liked, and leave filthy gifs on your friend's TV. For some games, you could even use it to enter cheats in a sort-of console style. Until *The Typing Of The Dead* though, it just didn't seem that useful. As ever, it took zombies to show us the way.

Now abandonware, *The Typing Of The Dead* replaced the light guns with keyboards. Every zombie appears with the phrase that, once typed, would kill

him. It enhanced the glorious rubbish excellence of the original game in every way – if you didn't think the atrocious script and voice-acting were hilarious enough, the combination of intensity and often absurd words you're forced to type is off-puttingly brilliant fun.

Looks like a friendly sort.

On top of an excellent game, you can go through all the sound files and make your computer gasp, "Please don't let me die" while you stand there. Laughing, and drunk with awesome power.





BACK IN THE DAY...



Cartridge Number 8

by Jon 'Log' Blyth

Look like baseball to you? Sure it does. There's the short-stop. And that one's... The bowler man. Look, I'm not American, I don't know their names. I just know that this is as close to baseball as humans had got back in 1982. But Philips didn't call it baseball - they had adopted a new futuristic naming convention. This glorious scene was taken from 8. Cartridge 8 may have been subtitled baseball, but that was in tiny letters and two other languages you didn't understand. It was the big stencilled '8' that you wanted. And when your console has close to zero thirdparty support - as the Videopac G7000 did - at least you know there'll be no fights over who gets the next number.













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NeverQuest (

Steve Hill slips on a hood for Guild Wars: Nightfall...

IKE IT OR not, the games magazine industry is run by PR people. They decide who gets to see what games, when the coverage will appear, and - in their minds - how positive it will be. When they're not crunching numbers, they double-up as glorified butlers, tending to the needs of journalists through an alcoholic haze and a rictus grin. However, one of the downsides of being constantly looked after by PR people is that you can become overly dependent on them. In fact, I lead such a cosseted existence that I can barely leave my house without having a team of dizzy blondes on hand to attend my every whim.

Thankfully, NeverQuest doesn't involve leaving the house, but I've lined up a PR person to help me anyway. Leona Kogaru is his in-game name, and he's waiting for me in the vibrant world of Guild Wars: Nightfall. Swiftly setting up a character, name of Neverquest Hill, I opt to be a Dervish and quickly throw together an outfit. Something of a hybrid look, I am essentially a hoodie in a green dress. Which is more than can be said for the awaiting Leona...

By day, a short-arsed Chinese Scotsman, by *Nightfall*, a slender seductress in a pair of skimpies. As he says in his press release: "Always be a girl character – American boys will give you free gold!"

It's certainly a theory, but it still feels uncomfortable seeing him like this. "Looking good," I muse. "Thought I'd pulled."

"I like to keep in shape," purrs the scantily-clad Leona, despite being a man sat in an office in Hertfordshire. While there's no arguing with her shape, Leona's bald pate is slightly perturbing, and I ask her if she's undergoing chemotherapy. As chat up lines go, it may not be the most silver-tongued, but she goes along with it, confirming: "Aye, final stages. You should see my bush."

ON A MISSION

Maybe later, but for now we have quests to embark on, and need to establish a firm.

"We don't need to mix with the common folk," announces Leona, "My heroes will fill up the party."

On her command, we're joined by a couple of swarthy types – Koss and Dunkuro – and set about the opening mission with gusto. Having skipped the back-story, I'm not entirely sure who we're up against, but someone called Kormir claims that: "They've overwhelmed the catapult crews! We must clear a path and retake those catapults to have any hope of sinking those ships!"

Or, as the potty-mouthed Leona confirms: "Right, we kill every motherf***** on the map and blow the shit out of those boats."

WE COULD BE HEROES

It's not the most ladylike description, but that's exactly what we do, despite Leona telling me I fight like a girl. Taking her advice, I perform some training, during which we stumble across a Mesmer enclosed behind a wooden fence.

"It's a helpless prisoner," says Leona.
"Shall we butcher him?" I joke, but
Leona takes me at my word, mercilessly
slaughtering the defenceless human being.

"Whoops," she says, mysteriously adding: "That's for Korea."

Moving swiftly on, someone called Nenah asks me to collect some juvenile termite legs for her.

"Yo," interrupts Leona. "Speak to this dude behind me. he doesn't like flowers."

Indeed he doesn't, and culling a few plants for him seems to be a gentle introductory quest. He's slightly undersold it though, as the flowers in question are huge, violent floating affairs, more than capable of felling a level 3 hoodie. But with the help of Leona and her heroes, the day is won and the prize is claimed. Leona even gets a bonus when she stumbles across a shipment of ink, exclaiming with genuine excitement: "Oh my god, I've been looking for this for ages!" Calm down dear...

INSECT POSSE

Entering somewhere called The Astralarium, Leona warns: "It gets a bit tougher now. I'm going to put my clothes back on but I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I'm still a filthy whore..."

Another quest is required, and Leona points out a "dude" who "doesn't like bugs". Following the flower incident, this time I'm forewarned, and lurk at the back as the rest of the party launch into a seemingly endless supply of giant insects. I pick a few off with my bow and arrow, but ultimately I'm not helping much, and we get our arses royally kicked. Or according to Leona, we have apparently been "mega pwned".

Shattering the magic, my PR sidekick then announces he has to get on with some reports, as it's "not all drinking heavily and playing games, unfortunately".

"Cool," I say. "*Countdown* is on soon anyway." I can just about manage that by myself.

"I like to keep in shape," purrs Leona, despite being a man from Hertfordshire





LOOKINGBACKSPECIALEDITION

SPECIAL EDITION UNREAL **ANTHOLOGY**

"Welcome to the desert of the Unreal," intones Will Porter theatrically...

www.unreal.com

IN THE BOX

Return To Na Pali

Game Of The Year Edition

The Awakening

Unreal Tournament 2004

Unreal II:

Unreal Tournament:

Unreal

Unreal:

DEVELOPER HERE'S NO DOUBT that Unreal's Epic/Digital Extremes engine constitutes the bedrock **PUBLISHER** Midway of the past five years of gaming. WEBSITE Countless titles have been constructed

> with its three iterations of clever coding PRICE £19.99 - but what of Epic's flagship games?

Unreal games are odd in that they've never garnered the outright love that other franchises roll around in daily. I mean, could you honestly explain the motivation of the Skaarj? Could you name the heroine of the first Unreal? Presented with a row of outlandish computerised flesh-globes, could you pick out the front bits of Unreal II's mission-giver Aida?

The very fact that the series' masterstroke came with the brute simplicity, speed and ingenious weaponry of the *Unreal Tournament* games – devoid of plot and depth, yet replete with elegant and brutal design - sums it up. The Unreal series is just a little hollow in the face of the Dooms and Half-Lifes of this world.

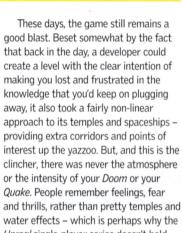
Time has perhaps been harsh though. The original *Unreal* was, is and always shall be a touchstone in PC gaming and clever level design. At the time, waking up in a derelict prison ship to face a level where enemies were only seen in fleeting glimpses before walking out into a beautiful panorama of wide-open spaces, waterfalls and four-armed peaceful natives was breathtaking.

good blast. Beset somewhat by the fact that back in the day, a developer could create a level with the clear intention of making you lost and frustrated in the knowledge that you'd keep on plugging away, it also took a fairly non-linear approach to its temples and spaceships providing extra corridors and points of interest up the yazzoo. But, and this is the clincher, there was never the atmosphere or the intensity of your Doom or your Quake. People remember feelings, fear and thrills, rather than pretty temples and water effects - which is perhaps why the Unreal single-player series doesn't hold the sway that history suggests it should.



Another reason, of course, is Unreal II: The Awakening – a game that was perhaps not as good as the PC ZONE reviewer at the time said it was. Beautiful for its time, and packed with innovative features like the smart in-game conversation system and inter-mission spaceship hub, the game's plot and voice-acting felt numb, while the action itself lacked the intensity of its rivals.

It's also a clear-cut example of the hype gravy train doing a game disservice though, as there's plenty to enjoy here even today - the situations you find













Unreal cities

Games that share a heart with those wicked Skaarj





With the advent of the third generation of the Unreal Engine, perhaps it's worth looking at the games whose inner workings run with the same virtual cogs and gears. Games that would be nothing without Epic. There's Nerf Arena Blast for example, or even more thrillingly, Virtual Reality Notre Dame! Just kidding... There's Clive Barker's Undying, Deus Ex, Brothers In Arms, Postal 2, Republic Commando, Tribes: Vengeance, Thief: Deadly Shadows, all the Splinter Cells, everything in the world to do with Tom Clancy and a gazillion of other games. This is why Epic clean their toilets with Domestos-covered \$500 bills. And the Domestos itself is made from diamonds.

yourself in are continually in flux, and each alien world you visit is unique from the others on the violence itinerary. And, of course, Aida has a chest that, when horizontal, you could park your bike in.

IN THE BOX

In the Unreal Anthology package then, the two single-player offerings serve as an intriguing exhibit on the lessons of gaming past. Next up are the games that single-handedly invented the big, bouncy and fun part of online gaming - and if you even dare to disagree, you can stick your precious Quake III pointy 'Q' straight up your unbelieving arse. In terms of botplay, weaponry, translocator madness, map design (Oh! Sweet Morpheus!) and sheer modder-love, the original *UT* is a real joy to go back to. There is, of course, a touch of the Memory Lanes at work here - but there's still a ton of players online (there are a lot of people playing the original Unreal's deathmatch too by the way).

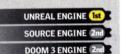
In terms of long-term play though, there's little reason to plug away at UT when compared to the might of UT2004. This is perhaps why UT2003 has been neatly sidestepped for the purposes of the Anthology - but while we're being completists, what about Unreal II XMP?

As needs no particular explanation, UT2004 is still the most comprehensive and most accessible online multiplayer package in existence and is the crowning glory of the Anthology at large.

If you're interested in the recent history of computer games as much as you are in their visceral thrill, then Unreal Anthology is a worthwhile purchase, as the games are a brilliant example of series that's at once misunderstood, chequered and occasionally quite brilliant.

Gears Of War seems to have replaced it as Epic's initial engine-show-off goliath release, but the Unreal juggernaut shows no sign of pulling onto the hard shoulder. With countless companies signed up to Unreal Engine 3, and number 4 in the works, the Skaarj may be down - but they might not be out. TEX

THE RAVAGES OF TIME



The games might have been patchy, but in terms of sheer ubiquity and the current onset of Unreal Engine 3 proves that tech-wise, Epic are still kings. Source may do the pretty, and Doom 3 may do the shiny faces - but Epic certainly know their 'ker-ching'.

LOOKINGBACKSUPERTEST

SUPERTEST ZOMBIE GAMES ON THE DVD





The ZONE team aren't afraid of zombies - after all, we look in the mirror every morning...

YOUR VIEW

Last month was game franchises. You said...

CIVILIZATION

"The Civ franchise is my favourite. I've got every version of it, except for Alpha Centauri and Call To Power. It's a bit like sex -I'm still crap at it, but it's kept me up most nights for as long as I can remember." DeusXM

EA SPORTS

"Each year, EA Sports try and shove their annoying products further up my arse. Their blithe indifference to the vandalism of previously quality titles has me shaking my head year after year." csdaveuk

"It never takes itself too seriously, and every sequel is worth the money, rather than warmed-up leftovers put out to sale at high prices. The money made has been used to improve the game - Ray Liotta, anyone?"

Pygmeman

HITMAN

"I don't tend to play many franchises, but the Hitman games get better with each release. Blood Money especially nailed the formula." psychoseal

COMMAND & CONQUER

"C&C: Red Alert (and even Generals) have always been great, even if they do have the habit of going off into total fantasy at some points - *cough* Yuri's Revenge..." **ICE MAN**

inhabit a dangerous position on the barometer of cool. Italian filmmaker Lucio Fulci makes a film in which a zombie wrestles a shark, and no-one can argue that zombies are the best thing in the world. But then Stubbs shambles into view, and you begin to feel a suspicion - are zombies being

OMBIES, LIKE NINJAS,

abused? Are they the equivalent of Little Britain catchphrases, over-used by idiots and not changing enough to warrant the attention they receive?

Luckily, the taint of uninspired misuse

can't touch the core zombie excellence - the idea of the dead coming back in expendable hordes to eat the brains of the living is just too innately cool to be ruined by such flimsy namechecks. The idea of being chased by something that can't run, but doesn't need to rest, remains utterly terrifying, especially if you're running up

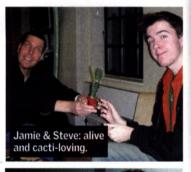
a sticky staircase that collapses around

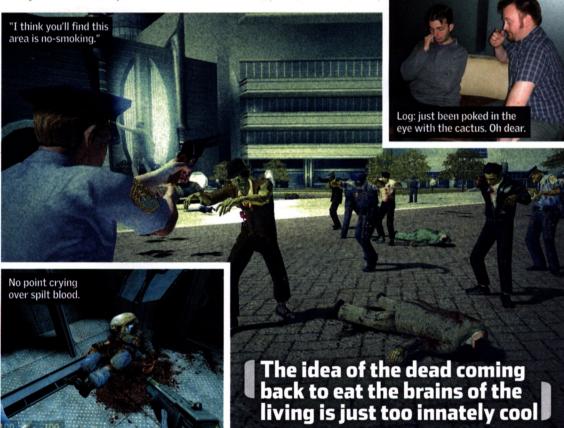
your ankles and your shoes come off and they've got your ankles, omg, and so on.

This month, it was our joyful task to pan through the zombie genre and pick out the games which do the subject justice. The first problem, which always comes up in these situations, is a cry of: "Ah, well that's not really a zombie." We decided to opt for the intuitive, illogical approach to classification, which includes deranged villagers, voodoo and anything we really wanted to talk about.

Once you've listened to us bending the definition of zombie to breaking point and abusing our privileged positions as men, in a room, with a voice recorder, log onto www.pczone.co.uk and go into the Forums, where you'll be able to register your opinions. If they're lucid, coherent or filthy, we'll put them in a column like the one to the left. Then you'll be as famous as one of those people in the opening rounds of The X Factor. PEZ







THERE'S A REASON NIGHTMARES HAPPEN IN THE DARK.

Mankind has no one else to turn to. Nowhere else to run. The planet is falling apart. Its people cornered within the only safe area remaining. The Locust Horde has risen and they won't stop coming. They won't stop killing. The government turns to whoever they have left. The sick, the wounded, the imprisoned. An inmate named Marcus Fenix. Once left to die, he is now humanity's last hope. He can take comfort in but one fact.

The human race isn't extinct. Yet.

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LOOKINGBACKCOMMENTARY

DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

PRE

Jon Blyth makes a spiritual pilgrimage back to the Dyson Sphere where he wrenched his girlfriend to death...

UMAN HEAD'S PHYSICS-**BENDING** portal-strewn shooter had a rickety ride to release. It was 11 years from brave theory to shop shelf - and who in 1995 would have imagined that the final game would feature ghost-on-child murders, tiny planets, vomiters coughing rejected limbs into your face, and thick pipes pumping around what might be muscle, or could well be excrement? It's time to catch up with Human Head's CEO, Tim Gerritsen (right), and co-founder Chris Rhinehart (left), to find out what's happening with the folk who kicked off the portal revolution...

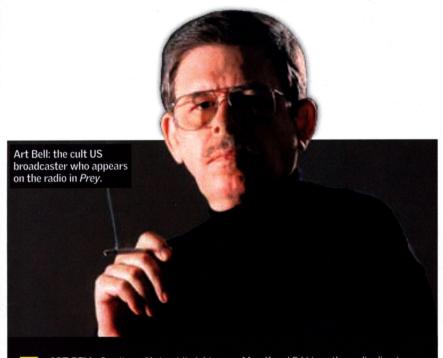


"I'll wrench you good, alien types.

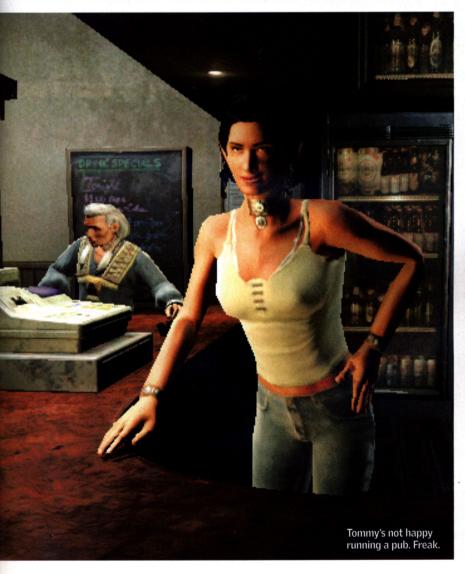
ABDUCTION: Rhinehart: "The level of interactivity in the initial scene in the bar had always been a major part of the storyline. We wanted to firmly entrench the real-world Earth aspect to the game, to give you reason to understand what Tommy's situation was and how he got into the situation he was in. Originally, we were going to make it less linear - you'd start the game with all of you being abducted, and you'd move back to the bar in a flashback sequence. In the end, we decided it was best to go the linear approach."

"Jenny's like the ultimate annoying girlfriend; she can come back spiritually just like Obi-Wan' Chris Rhinehart, co-founder, Human Head

JENNIFER OH JENNY: Rhinehart: "Will you see her again? Well, you see her at the end of the game. She's like the ultimate annoying girlfriend; she can come back spiritually like Obi-Wan. You can be hitting on a new girl, and all of a sudden she'll show up. Selfishly, I hope that Jenny's back in the sequel, because I want to hang with Crystal Lightning again - she's the voice actress who played Jenny. I definitely wouldn't mind seeing her again."



ART BELL: Gerritsen: "Art got it right away. Myself and Ed Lima, the audio director, had contacted him to see if he'd be interested. Being games developers, we tend to be up late at night, so a lot of us had listened to Coast To Coast AM and thought it would be a nice touch to get it in there. When we contacted him, he was all for it right from the get-go. He's receptive to the idea of aliens, but at the same time he's sceptical enough to make it fun to listen to. We took him the initial scripts and told him to make them his own – it was completely natural to him. He's this crazy, consummate professional, and he did everything in one take."

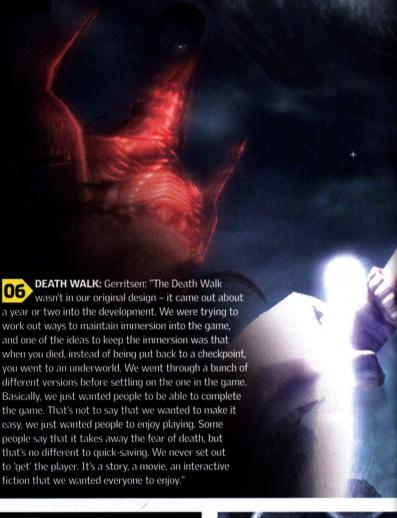




LOOKINGBACKCOMMENTARY

JUKEBOX: Gerritsen: "A combination of things influenced what we had on the jukebox. We originally wanted it to be full of old Roadhouse music, with what we Americans call 'shit-kicker music'. Just the kind of stuff you'd hear in a typical backwater bar in the States. That's what we were going for, but then we were told we could have some modern acts as well. So our audio director worked with the guys at 2K and tried to figure out what we could get hold of. We picked the old classics, but the newer tracks came towards the end. If you hang around and listen in the later scene where the aliens are in your bar, you can hear one of the Hunters say, 'I love that song'!"







EVIL KIDS: Rhinehart: "Originally, the kids' faces just changed a little bit when they got possessed, and their eyes would start glowing. The problem was that the change was too subtle, so part-way through the game we decided to make them into ghosts to see if that would be any more creepy. It definitely helped us, because we put the children in a lot of the darker areas, and it was tough to see them with just the glowing eyes. We didn't want to light the room too bright so that it wasn't scary any more, so as ghosts they were both creepy and visible. It wasn't necessarily any better or any worse, it was just different, so in the end we decided to go with ghosts. And I'm sure it helped the game to get released in Germany, too."



Old cherokees don't die - they

"We thought it'd be funny to make you think you had to go through the seven trials... When the invasion happened, the play-testers were like, 'awesome'!"

Tim Gerritsen, CEO, Human Head



SEVEN TRIALS: Gerritsen: "We actually had the seven trials planned for *Prey*. The idea was that Tommy would start the trials, and then the invasion of the spirit world would happen. Then we thought about it, and thought it would make more sense to have the invasion happen straight away. As far as his character is concerned, he's just killed his girlfriend. He's angry, he's ready to train with his grandfather, and he's been pulled into the spirit realm. From a pacing standpoint, we just couldn't have you go through puzzles – you're all revved up, so you have to keep on fighting. But we thought it would be kinda funny to make you think you had to go through seven trials. It worked really well with the play-testers – when the invasion happened they were like 'awesome'!"





XBOX 360

THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE



PLAYED IT!

We visit Bungie to playtest Halo 3! 17+ new screens inside the mag...

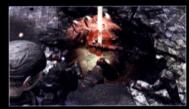






REVIEWED

The first magazine to finish and rate the gruesome sci-fi shooter...





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and the burning question:
what did you want to be when you were seven?

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ime we'll all be fat and









Huge feature of Irrational's submerged and disturbed RPG shooter! Featuring brand-new info, interviews, screenshots and images from the scariest game of 2007. DO NOT MISS THIS!

FREE COLLECTABLE BIOSHOCK 2007 CALENDAR!

40+ PAGE SPECIAL! THE GAMES OF 2007



TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

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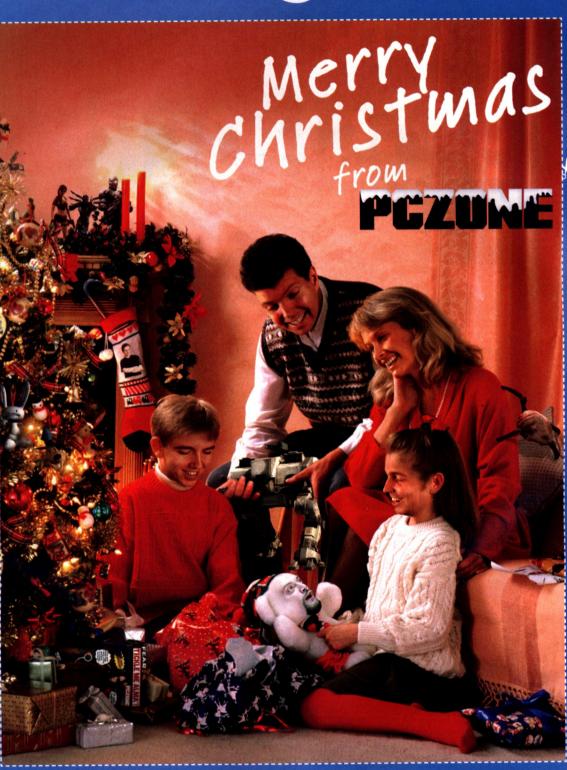
Assassin's Creed & Supreme Commander!

ALSO! Steve Hill's NeverQuest, Pavel Barter's Special Report on gaming culture, Freeplay, Retro Zone – and did we mention the Bioshock calendar?



PCZONE presents...

OUR FESTIVE DIY CHRISTMAS CARD



- 7. You will need normal, boring Christmas cards and a copy of PC ZONE for every card you wish to make. Photocopying this page is like piracy or stealing our souls, or something. We'll abseil through your windows if you try it.
- 2. Cut out the card using a massive pair of scissors. Ask an adult to help you with this, perhaps your dad. Unless he's incredibly clumsy, in which case you might set off an absurd chain of events that eventually blinds the dog.
- 3. Glue our delightful family scene over whatever boring nativity scene. Don't worry, this isn't blasphemous. You might like to get your mother to help you with this part, unless she has a history of solvent abuse.
- 4. Write yourself a message from us in the inside. Some suggestions are 'You're totally our favourite reader' and 'We give you 94%'. Then, cut out and glue our signatures on the inside of the card, and the contract is sealed.
- 5. Remove all your other cards from the mantelpiece with a dramatic sweep, then daintily place our card in the middle. Put your hands on your hips and make a satisfied nod, before enjoying the finest Christmas you've ever had.



Note:

This card absolutely guarantees you joy on Earth and peace to all men. If you suffer any disharmony, or a moment of crestfallen introspection over the holiday period, then simply make more cards. If a wave of irresistible love doesn't nudge stubbornly into your back, then there's probably something wrong with you.







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AND YOU NEED TO STRENGTHEN YOUR DEFENCES TO PROTECT A SPRAWLING POPULACE.

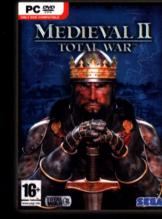


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NOVEMBER 2006

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